

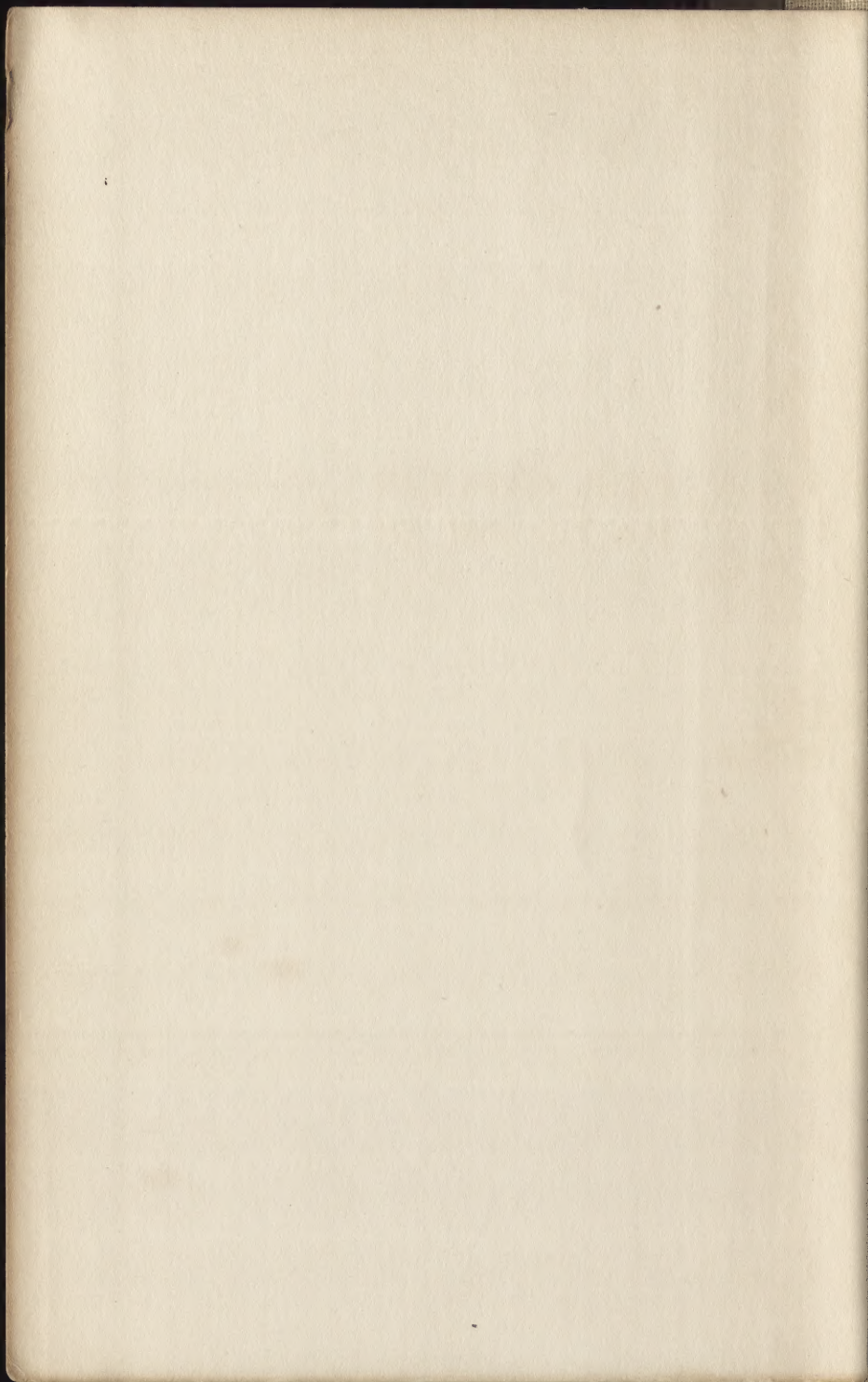
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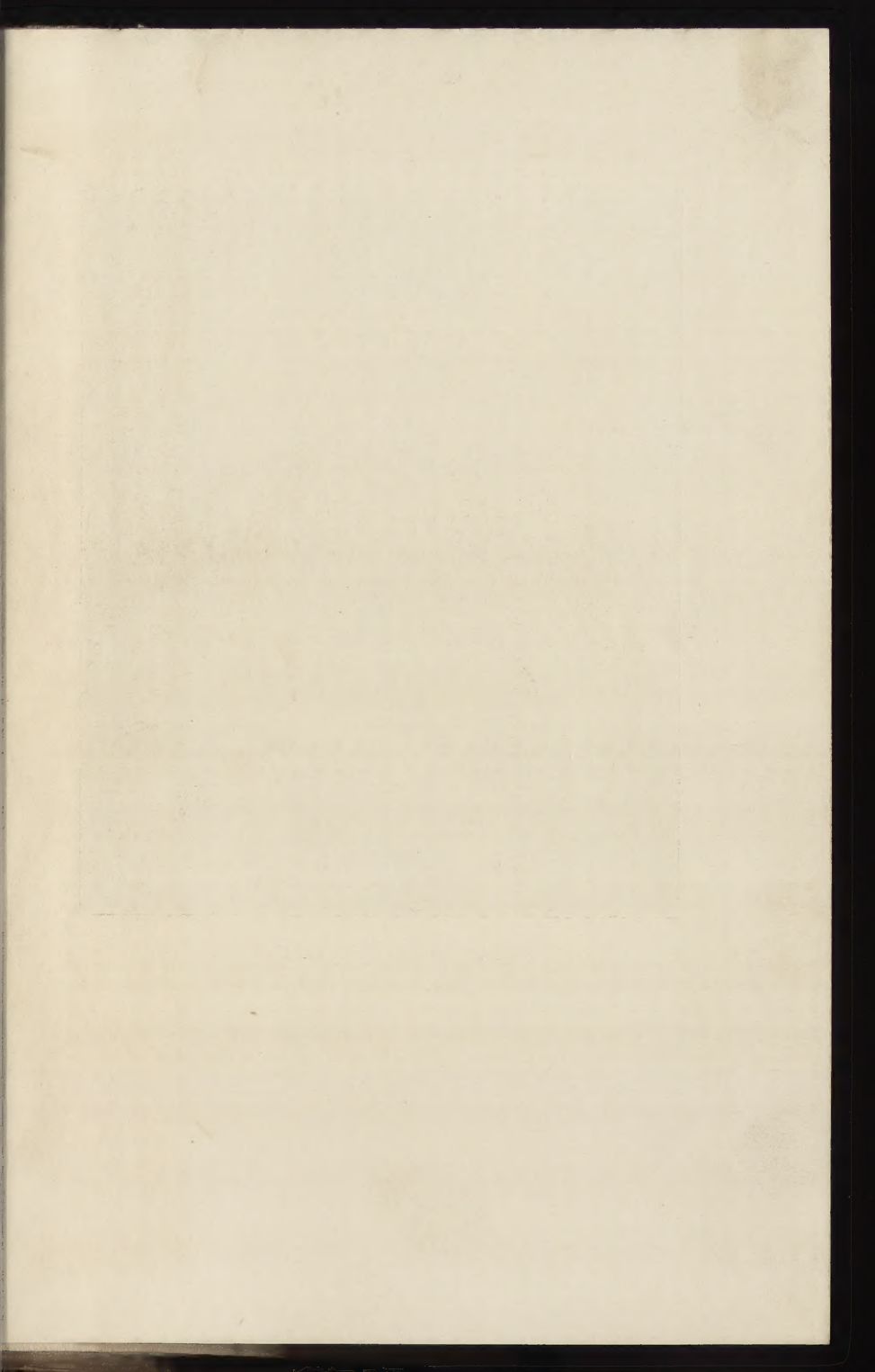
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His Life and Art

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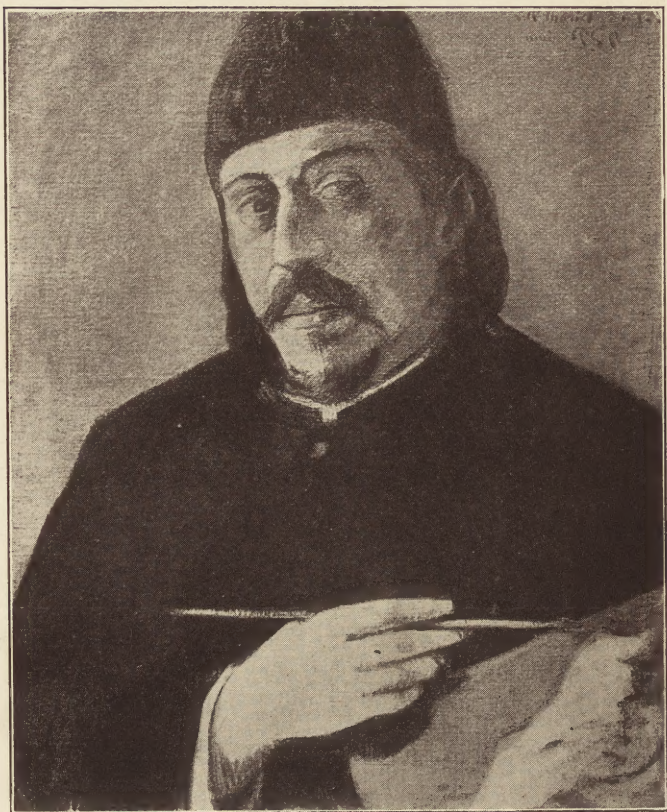
*NOA NOA. By Paul Gauguin.*

*Translated from the French by O. F. Theis.*

*With ten illustrations in half tone. \$2.00*







SELF-PORTRAIT OF GAUGUIN

# PAUL GAUGUIN

## His Life and Art

BY  
JOHN GOULD FLETCHER

*WITH TEN ILLUSTRATIONS*



NICHOLAS L. BROWN  
NEW YORK MCMXXI



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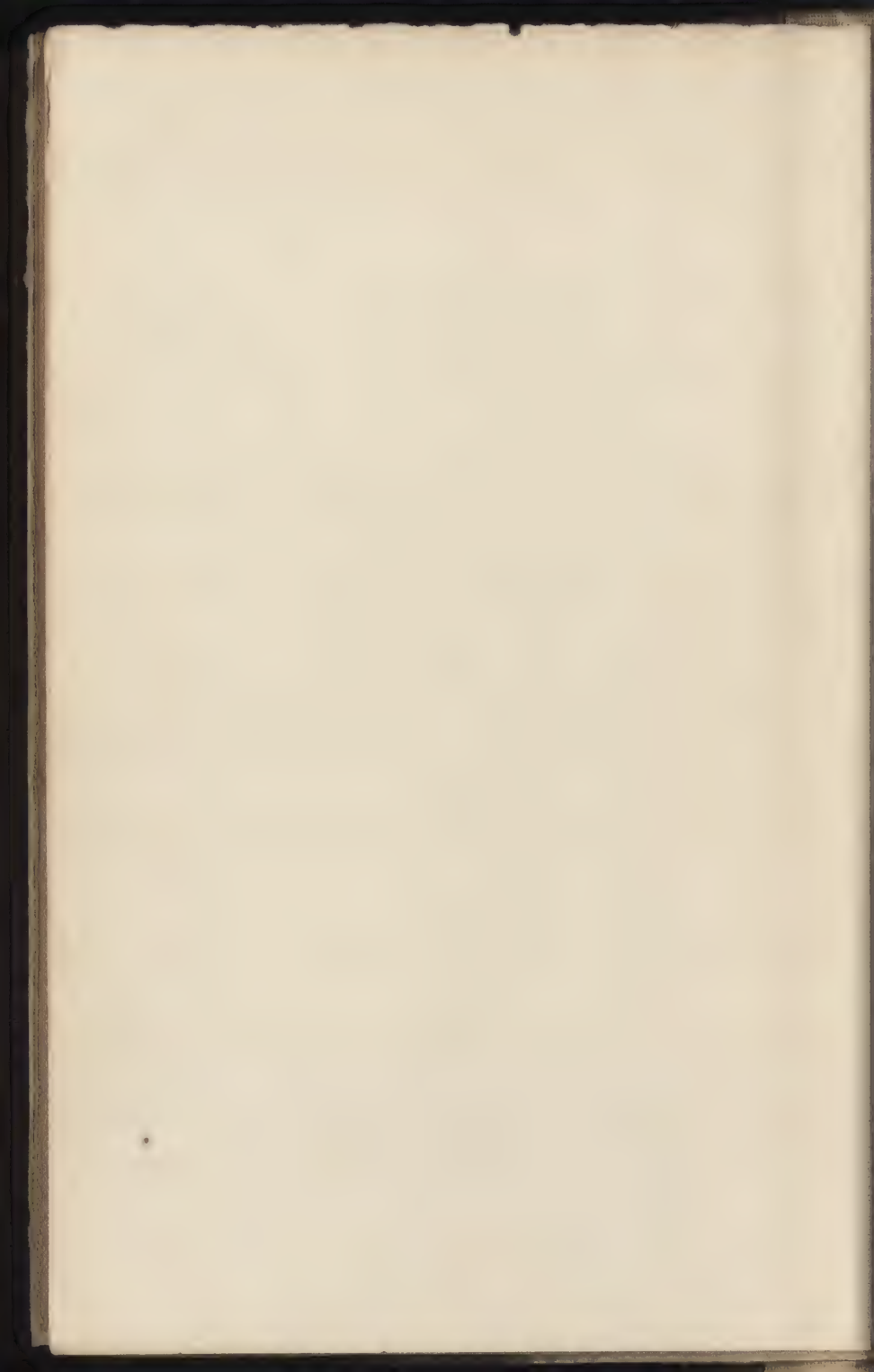
“Improvement makes straight roads;  
but the crooked roads without improve-  
ment are the roads of genius.”

WILLIAM BLAKE.

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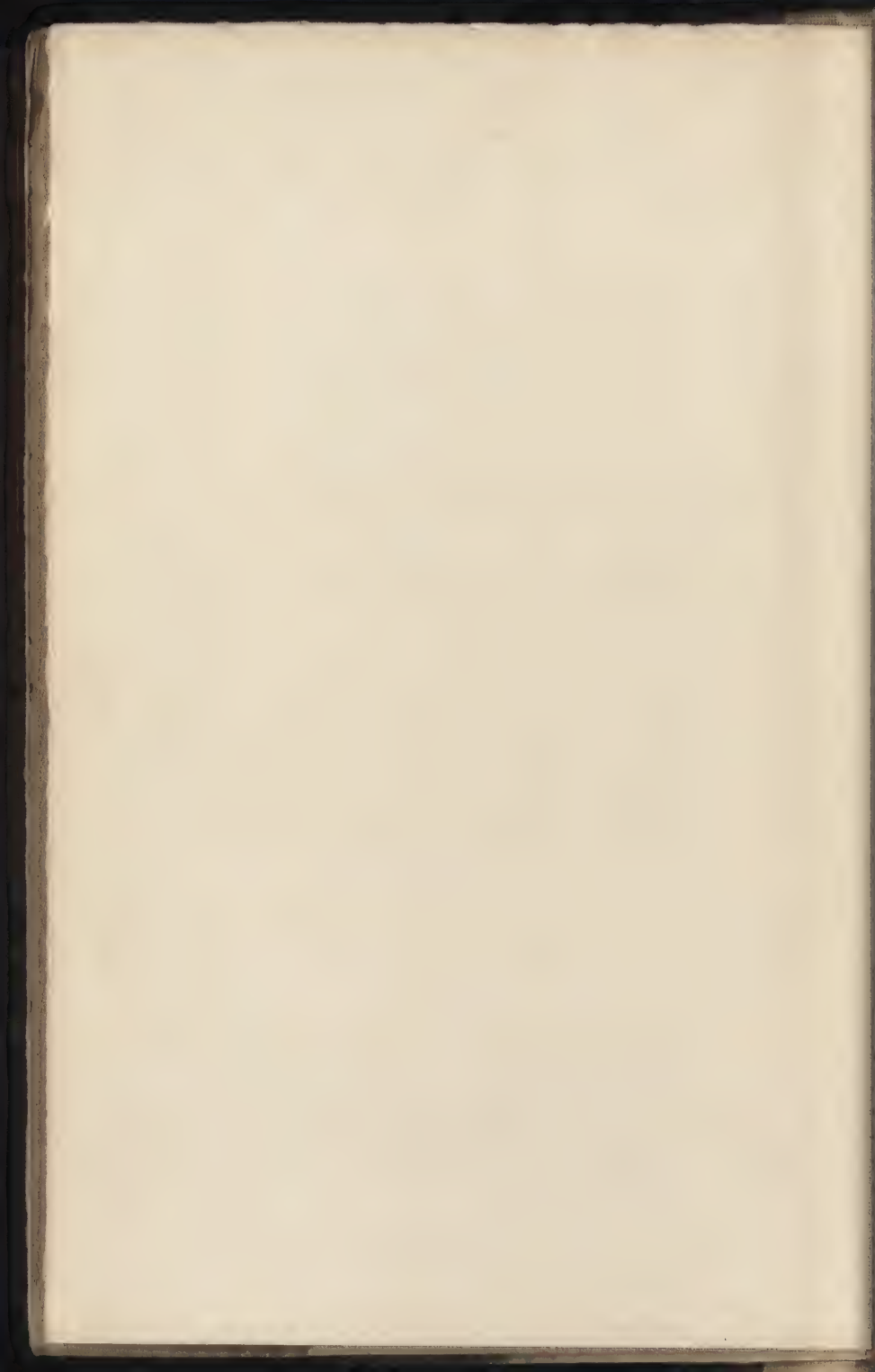
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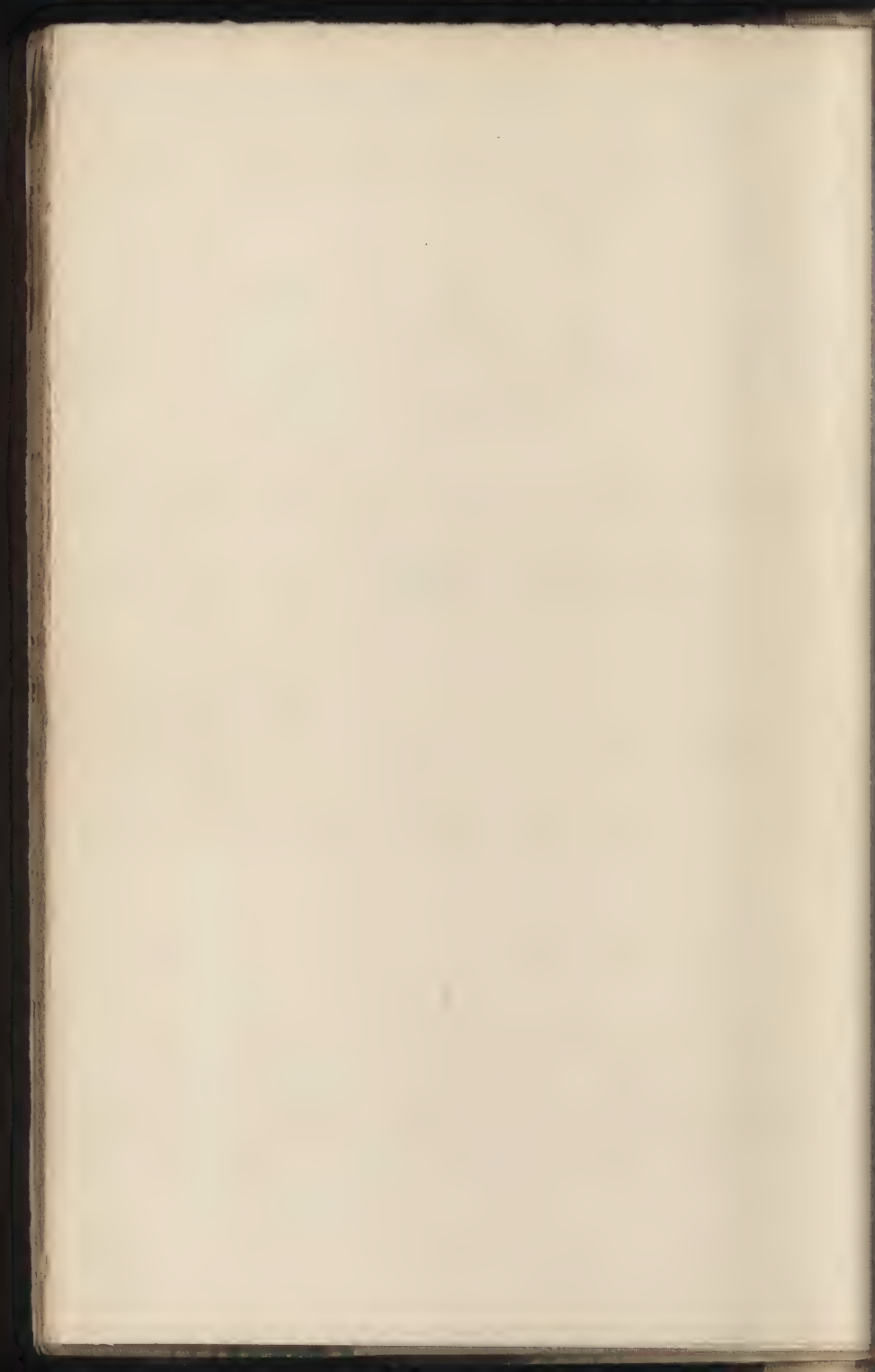
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PAUL GAUGUIN



## PART I: THE FORMATION

1849-1885

**A**BOUT the middle of the last century there occurred in Paris a series of events which seemed at the time likely to be of importance to future history, secondary only to the days of the French Revolution. You will seek Paris in vain for any public monument to these events, known as the Revolution of 1848. Only the name of the hideously utilitarian Boulevard Raspail may perhaps remind you, that in this year France achieved another one of those political failures which have been so curiously common in her history since 1789.

In February of that year, King Louis Philippe and his ministers had fled before the rising storm of popular feeling. It seemed at last that the great popular revolu-

tion of the working classes, dreamed of by every artist since 1789, proclaimed in the Rabelaisian caricatures of Daumier, latent in the troubled Romanticism of the epoch, was at hand. A provisional republic was formed and elections were held to the National Assembly. But the provinces showed that it mattered little to them whether the form of Government was changed or not. So long as the peasant had his farm, his cow, his money safely stowed away in a stocking, a hard-working wife, a pipe and a glass of wine, he was content with things as they were. If the industrial classes of Paris were starving, that was not his affair. He shared none of their fanatic Socialism, none of their dreams of the millennium. He wanted to be left alone.

The National Assembly proved to be overwhelmingly moderate, and the leaders of the Provisional Government discovered that they preferred to stand with the majority rather than to fall with the Parisian extremists. But the latter were not to be



beaten without a struggle. On the fifteenth of May, a mob attempted to take the Assembly by storm, and failed. On the eighteenth, Lamartine, the former idol of the Revolutionaries, was hooted down while making a conciliatory speech. The Government found that it must either provide work and wages for the Parisian unemployed or run the risk of an appeal to force. A scheme was started, but it proved to be costly, and on the twenty-first of June the Government faced about and announced that it intended to proceed no further with its project. Three days later the storm broke. Two hundred and twenty-one barricades arose as if by magic in the streets, crowned with red flags and manned by sixty thousand men. For three days the mob kept up a desperate resistance; then the last barricade fell, the blood was washed off the pavements, the cause of "moderation" and "good sense" was restored.

There is a poetic justice in the coincidence of some events. On the seventh of June a



PORTRAIT OF GAUGUIN'S MOTHER

one of the obscure newspapers of Liberal opinion, that so greatly flourished about this time. His influence upon his son was slight, as is the case with the fathers of most artists. It is to Madame Gauguin that we must turn for an explanation of the character of her famous son.

Aline Marie Gauguin was the daughter of a certain Chazal, of whom we know nothing, and of the then celebrated Socialist pamphleteer and agitator, Flora Tristan.

Flora Tristan was born in 1803 at Lima, Peru. Her father was a Spaniard of noble descent, Mariano Tristan y Moscoso. He served as an officer in the Peruvian Army, and probably took part in the wars of independence which severed Peru from Spain, since we find him and his family later occupying positions of dignity and affluence under the Republic. In 1818 he sent his daughter to school in Paris. She eloped the next year with Chazal and was disowned by her parents. After the birth of her child she separated from her husband and

returned to Peru, seeking a reconciliation with her family. But the family had determined to do nothing for the self-willed, impulsive daughter, and she drifted back to Paris, where she attempted to support herself by writing pamphlets of strongly Socialistic tendencies. She became a pioneer of woman's suffrage, of humanitarianism, of the trade-union movement. She toured France making speeches. In 1836 she had the misfortune to meet Chazal again in Paris, who stabbed her in a fit of jealousy and was condemned to twenty years of penal servitude for the offense. A few years later she died in Bordeaux, and the trade-unions, remembering her zeal for their cause and her personal beauty—which had moved them perhaps more than the fervor of her speeches—subscribed the sum necessary to put up a monument.

Such were the parents and the grandparents of the child who had just been born into the world. The tragic and violent union of Chazal and Flora Tristan serves



to explain the man and the artist he later became. In Chazal we find the source of his violence and headstrong irritability; in Flora Tristan we see whence he drew his love of personal and individual liberty, his hatred of moral restraint, his scorn of the bourgeoisie, his Spanish hauteur and stoicism. Half-savage Spanish blood flowed in his veins, a mixture of Arab, Celt and African. Perhaps in his Peruvian descent there were even other currents—currents of that Inca race which the Spaniards had subdued but not conquered. Whatever else destiny held in store for him, it was certain from the beginning that Paul Gauguin could never be wholly assimilated to the intellectual effort of the frivolous and fickle city of Paris.

## II

The earliest adventures of the future painter combined the peculiar strands of tragedy, romance and savagery which were to recur so often in his later life. In December, 1851, the makeshift Republic came to an end and Louis Napoleon, by an easy *coup d'état*, restored the Empire. Clovis Gauguin found himself ruined with the suspension of the Liberal paper for which he wrote. There was only one hope remaining: that Flora Tristan's relations in Lima might do something for Paul and his sister Marie. So the family set out for Peru. On the way, during the terrible passage through the Straits of Magellan, Clovis Gauguin was seized with heart failure and died. His body was taken ashore and buried at Port Famine, or Punta Arenas, the southernmost town in the world, in Chile.

The mother and her two orphaned children were received with kindness by the head of the family, Flora Tristan's uncle, Don Pio Tristan y Moscoso. Concerning this personage Gauguin himself told many anecdotes in later years. Probably most of these were inexact to the point of being fable pure and simple. We must remember that Gauguin at this time was scarcely four years of age. We know that the family were wealthy nobles, of high social standing, who lived in the old Castilian manner of luxury and indolence. From such surroundings Gauguin doubtless derived much of the "hidalgo manner" that distinguished him throughout life—a blend of haughtiness, reserve and egoism, masking often a real shyness before people. And here he saw, also for the first time, works of art produced by a non-European civilization: ceramics, jewelry, fabrics of Inca origin. The remembrance of these specimens of savage, primitive art undoubtedly influenced his mind in later years.

Gauguin's stay in Lima did not last long. Four years later his paternal grandfather died in France, and his mother returned to that country in order to obtain her share of his estate, which proved to be only a small sum.

In later years, the painter believed, or affected to believe, that if his mother had remained in Peru and had neglected her relations in France she would have been left heiress to Don Pio Tristan's property. It is probable that Gauguin was here merely romancing, as he often did, when desiring to mystify and startle people about his life. It is an enchanting but fruitless speculation to wonder what course the boy's mind might have taken had it been subjected for a few more years to the influence of Peruvian life. Peru undoubtedly gave him a love for the tropics, for exotic, out-of-the-way, old-fashioned places, unspoiled by the nineteenth century. Unconsciously many of the traits that made his character so little comprehen-



sible to the Frenchmen of his day were planted in him during these years.

France was now to give him something different. He was to be educated, or rather to receive what passed for an education. He remained at a seminary at Orleans till the age of seventeen, hating his studies, becoming more and more intractable and unteachable. This seminary, as all such institutions in France at the time, was conducted by Jesuit priests.

In later days he declared that all he had learned from the years that he had spent at the seminary were a hatred of hypocrisy, false virtue and spying. And with malicious irony he said: "And I also learnt there a little of that spirit of Jesuit casuistry, which is a force not to be despised in the struggle with other people."

His sole ambition was to escape, to get to sea again, to make voyages to the tropics. His mother dreamed of placing him as a cadet in the navy, but he ignominiously

failed to pass the necessary examination. He was therefore placed in the merchant marine. This decision of his mother he regretted bitterly to the end of his life.

In 1865 he embarked aboard the *Luzitano*, a cargo boat, on a voyage from Havre to Rio de Janeiro. His grade aboard this ship was that of a pilot's apprentice.

Of this voyage, which enabled him to see again the tropics, Gauguin retained in later years important memories.

In the fragmentary note-books he kept in Tahiti he declared that it was during this voyage that he heard from the lips of a ship-mate a story of the latter's life when shipwrecked among the natives of the Society Islands in the Pacific. The remembrance of that story may have influenced him later in his choice of Tahiti as an ideal residence. At least the appearance of Rio de Janeiro's harbor awakened in his mind fresh enthusiasm for the tropics. The stay at Rio was further signalized by a liaison with an

actress, of that eminently casual kind which Gauguin was to experience so often later on. Finally the return voyage brought about another liaison, this time with a Prussian woman, and in defiance of ship's discipline. It was certain that his character was not of the sort that could be fitted easily into the mold of self-restraint necessary to produce a capable naval officer. At all events, the next thing we hear is that Gauguin quitted the merchant service and enlisted in the French Navy as a common sailor, in February, 1868. Probably by this time his mother had refused to support him, and he was forced into this position through necessity.

The cruiser *Jerome Napoleon*, on which he found himself, was, to his chagrin, ordered to cruise in northern waters. So instead of seeing the tropics again, Gauguin's new experiences were only of the ice-bound Greenland coast and the barren North Cape. This was bad, but still worse was to follow.

The vessel was on its way to Spitzbergen when news was brought to its captain that France had declared war upon Prussia.

"Where are you going?" said the second officer, seeing the Captain put the helm about.

"To Charenton," replied the indignant first officer; Charenton being the great lunatic asylum near Paris!

The vessel got no nearer to France than Copenhagen, when the melancholy news of Sedan came. The name *Jerome Napoleon* was painted out, that of *Desaix* substituted, and the unfortunate cruiser was obliged to remain in the waters off Copenhagen till the close of the war in 1871, contenting herself with the capture of one small ship as prize.



### III

In 1871, after the cessation of hostilities, Gauguin obtained leave, renewable at the end of eighteen months, to quit the navy. He was now heartily sick of the sea, because of the enforced idleness and wearisome discipline that he had now endured aboard the *Desaix* for three years. Besides the opportunity of another career was offering itself and he felt that he must seize it.

His mother had died in the interval since he had last seen France and, in dying, had confided the care of her two children to a well-to-do Paris banker, Gustave Arosa. This man immediately found for Paul a place at Bertin's, a banking house with which he was connected. And now there opened for the young man a period not only the most prosperous but in retrospect the most amazing of his career.

Though his character had already dis-

played itself to be that of an instinctive nomad, a lover of the tropics and essentially a pagan savage, yet it is apparent that he now yielded readily to the entrancing prospect of amassing a fortune by speculation on the Bourse, without troubling himself too much with the question whether his new position might not entail heavier responsibilities in the future. He had not been long at Bertin's before he found out how to make money quite easily. Possibly this was not a very difficult thing to do, for the Paris stock market had been utterly disorganized by the events of 1870-71, and, now that peace was signed, France was making one of those rapid recoveries that have been so common in her history. Stocks were going up and trade was booming. Gauguin was able to take advantage of these circumstances to such an extent that in one year, we are told, he made as much as forty thousand francs.

In 1873 he married, thus saddling himself with a responsibility he was never wholly to shake off. His wife, Mette Sophia Gad,

was the daughter of a Protestant clergyman of Copenhagen. The family was a good one and enjoyed an honorable position in the society of the Danish capital. The daughters had been educated at Paris, and one of them had married a member of the Norwegian Parliament, while another had become the first wife of the painter, Fritz Thaulow.

When or where Gauguin first met his future bride is uncertain, but it was probably during the stay of the *Desaix* at Copenhagen. At any rate it seems that he was eager to marry, as the ceremony (a purely civil one, owing to his wife being a Protestant) was delayed owing to the loss of his father's certificate of birth in the bombardment of St. Cloud.

At this time, through his wife's friends and connections, through Gustave Arosa, through Emile Schuffenecker—a fellow employee at Bertin's—and through others, a new interest came into his life. He began to paint, although pressure of work did not permit him to regard this fresh occupation

as more than an amusement at first. Arosa was, in his way, an amateur of art and had collected a number of pictures by French artists of the day—among them Delacroix and Courbet. These works he engraved in photogravure—an art then in its infancy—and sent copies of the engravings to his personal friends. Through Schuffenecker Gauguin was brought closely into touch with the Impressionists, who were then making a sensation in Paris. Gauguin bought brushes and colors and began by painting on Sundays and holidays. It was only slowly that he began to look upon painting as anything but a distraction.

His first essays in art were purely academic. He painted in the prevailing style of the Salons and even sent one picture to the Salon of 1876. At the same time he began to attempt sculpture. He worked at first in marble, a material afterwards entirely rejected in favor of the more coarsely-grained surface of wood, clay or paste. He



liked a rough surface and counseled young sculptors to mix sand with the clay in order to emphasize this roughness.

Gauguin's was a many-sided and a versatile nature. His early years at sea had given him much of the sailor's ingenuity. He had a tremendous interest in the technical processes of art. During his life he was able to do almost equally well at painting, lithography and sculpture. He also attempted etching, stained glass and pottery. His writings, particularly his share in "Noa Noa," show a considerable grasp of direct, poetic narrative—a gift that might very possibly have made of him a good poet. Throughout his life we are unable to regard him solely as a painter of pictures; his influence in opening new channels for art-decoration is even more important than his pictorial work. Even in literature his achievements have a certain force as inspiration. The problems he set himself were as varied in their way as those that occupied his

English contemporary, William Morris, almost as varied as those that occupied Leonardo da Vinci.

He acquired knowledge easily; his problem was always how to weigh, sift and make use of it. But his growth to artistic maturity was slower than in the case of artists who limit their field of effort, because he attacked many subjects at the same time.

It may seem strange to consider this many-sided versatility as a proof, not of a complex, but of a primitive nature. Yet it is undoubtedly true that in the primitive stages of art the artist is able to do almost everything. The interchangeability, the essential unity of all the arts, is the strongest characteristic of art in its early stages. As civilization and consequently technique become more advanced, it grows more and more difficult for a man to become master of any single branch of art. Perhaps that is why, in our modern industrialized states, the arts tend to disappear, to become the





THE PAINTER SCHUFFENECKER AND HIS FAMILY



interest and hobby of a rapidly diminishing minority.

All this was not suspected by Gauguin at the time, nor for years afterwards. For the time he was content to paint and to follow the prevailing fashions in his painting. And he soon found that the prevailing fashion of the day in Paris was Impressionism.

To define Impressionism it is not necessary, as many professional art-critics have done, to enter into long dissertations as to the supremacy of pure colors, nor to see in Constable or Turner the ancestry of the movement.

Impressionism was neither more nor less than the cult of Realism—or to speak better, Naturalism—carried out in painting. This cult had already possessed in painting one important precursor, Gustave Courbet. But it is to literature, always the advance guard of the arts, that we must turn to

understand what impressionism intended and why it failed.

A little before 1870, which year marks a turning point not only in France's political but also in her intellectual life, there came a change over her literature. Romanticism, which had startled the world in 1830 with Lamartine, de Musset, de Vigny, Hugo and Balzac, was now dead. The heroic, the Napoleonic, the Byronic attitude had somehow gone out of life. Under the Second Empire, the bourgeois triumphed over the Tuileries.

A few years before the crash of 1870, Charles Baudelaire gave to the world his *Fleurs du Mal*—the exasperated cry against life of a soul tortured with too great a sensibility. Almost at the same time Gustave Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*, erected his monument of infamy to the memory of the bourgeois. These two books opened the path to Naturalism, to the "human document," to the de Goncourts, to de Maupassant, and to Zola.

Impressionism was the logical outgrowth, in another sphere, of the work of these Naturalist writers.

It abolished the lighting of the studio and substituted for it natural sunlight.

It abolished the classical "subject" and left the painter free to paint, as Manet said, "*N'importe quoi.*"

Thus, on the one side, it led directly to the analysis of atmospheric vibration, foreshadowed by Constable and Turner, but not by them elevated to the rank of a science; and on the other side, it led with equal inevitability to the total dependence of the painter upon Nature, and the consequent atrophy of his imagination. It was, as Manet said again, "Nature seen through a temperament."

Against Impressionism, as against Romanticism, only one artist had dared to continue the tradition of classical, decorative painting descending from Giotto, through Raphael and Poussin, to Prud'hon

and to Ingres. This was the Norman, Puvis de Chavannes.

But Puvis, though nearly fifty, was still unknown, still dreaming of walls to conquer, still buried away from the eyes of the young men in the slumbrous depths of the official salons, while Impressionism was the *succès de scandale* of the day.

Gauguin heard of Impressionism and became a devout follower of its theories. He painted pictures in the manner of Camille Pissarro, who was a compatriot of Madame Gauguin, having been born in the Island of St. Thomas in the Antilles, then Danish territory. Gauguin took part in the exhibitions of the Impressionist group in 1880 and 1881.

Huysmans, then as later the disciple of Naturalism pushed to its extreme limit, praised a nude of his because it was ugly. Gauguin began to be talked about, not only as a well-to-do amateur, but as a coming artist. But his work at the Bourse was exhausting his strength and his time. Al-



though he had now a wife and five children dependent on him, Gauguin in January, 1883, took the rash step of quitting the financial world and devoting himself solely to art.

This decision was, as Dr. Segalen says in his valuable Preface to the letters Gauguin wrote from Tahiti, the true turning-point in his career. When Paul Gauguin said to himself, "Henceforward I will paint every day," he was not only satisfying his vague and latest personal ambition and aptitude, he was setting himself to the fulfillment of a great impersonal duty: he was beginning to clear away the sophistications not only of his own nature but of modern art.

#### IV

It is important to note that Gauguin was thirty-five years of age when he came to this decision. This proves that the decision was no hasty one, of which he was liable to repent later. At such an age a man has arrived at his intellectual maturity; and, when this man is a Paul Gauguin, we may feel sure that he does not alter his whole manner of living from a mere desire for change. Gauguin had something to express and knew it. He had better work to do than dabbling in stocks and shares. And to this work he was determined to devote himself despite all opposition.

But had he not been instinctively a nomad and a savage, with the desire for freedom, for life without compromise and for the harmony that comes only from a natural expression of one's deepest instincts, this decision might never have been taken. As a

husband and father he now had others dependent upon him. That he set aside their claims to follow the deeper call proves that, as he later said, he believed himself to have the right to dare everything. And he was probably at first confident of success, thinking an artistic career likely to be as easy to manage as that of a speculator.

Madame Gauguin seems to have acquiesced in this decision. She was naturally desirous to be ranked as the wife of a famous and successful man, and her husband may well have dazzled her with the prospects of his success. In any case, she was soon destined to sad disillusionment.

Gauguin found it impossible to support himself and six others on the sums he had saved. As for his pictures, they were not sufficiently well known to sell. It was necessary, above all things, to gain time. So he decided to sacrifice a collection of modern pictures which he had bought with the proceeds of his career on the Bourse, in order to support himself. The list of these

pictures is interesting, as it shows clearly the direction of his tastes at this period. It included a Manet, several Renoirs, some Claude Monets, two Cézannes (still life and landscape), an early Pissarro, together with examples of Guillaumin, Sisley, Jongkind, Lewis Brown and, most significant of all, two designs by Daumier.

Whether it was that Gauguin had continued to maintain his family in a style above his present means and was therefore now in debt, we do not know. Nor do we know whether the sale of his collection realized an appreciable sum or not. Probably the amount was small, for the Impressionists, though talked about, had not achieved that purely commercial popularity which is the modern substitute for fame. In any case, the painter soon found himself again without resources. He had ignominiously failed to carve out a new career for himself in Paris. He found that he could not now obtain another commercial post to take the place of Bertin's. So it was Madame



Gauguin's turn to act. She decided on a removal to Copenhagen, where she hoped her family would use their influence in obtaining a position for her husband.

Once in the Danish city, however, the basic difference between husband and wife showed itself in violent form. The atmosphere of rigid Protestant piety, in which his wife's family lived, jarred on the passionate southern temperament of the painter. He discovered that he hated everything in Denmark, the scenery, the climate, the prudery and provinciality of the inhabitants, the lack of Parisian Bohemianism—everything except the cookery of his mother-in-law! And he took no pains to conceal his hatred. He defiantly persisted in maintaining his Parisian freedom of speech and manners. One day, walking on the road that overlooks the bay of the Sund, he chanced to look down. Each of the estates adjoining the beach is equipped with a small cabin for bathing. It is the custom there for the sexes to bathe separately and entirely naked. Gauguin

chanced to stop and look down at the moment when the wife of a Protestant minister was stepping into the water. Instead of going on, he decided to indulge his æsthetic interest in the nude. The daughter of the minister's wife saw him and called out to her mother to return. The lady turned and started hastily back to her cabin. But Gauguin continued his inspection. Next day there was the inevitable scandal.

Such a state of affairs could clearly not continue. Gauguin would yield nothing to the prejudices of the Danes, nor would his wife's family change their ideas of respectability to suit his queer notions. A separation between husband and wife was inevitable. In 1885 it came about with, one may imagine, no great regrets on either side. To the painter this marriage had all along been a matter of convenience. We shall have ample opportunity to observe throughout his career that Gauguin attached practically no sentiment to the sexual relations into which he entered with various women.

He was probably more affectionate with his children, particularly with his daughter Aline, than ever with his wife.

It was now far more convenient for him that his wife should remain with her relations, where she would at least have a roof over her head, than accompany him to Paris, whither he was determined to return. Madame Gauguin agreed with this arrangement, hoping to see her husband, now dis-embarrassed of his family, make a rapid conquest of the Parisian art-world. And so in 1885 Paul Gauguin returned to France once more to try his fortune.

## V

He was now thirty-seven years old. Hitherto the events of his life had been largely controlled by chance; from now on he began to strive more consciously to be the master of his own destiny. It is therefore necessary, before going further with this story, to take stock of the man, both as regards his physical appearance and his intellectual equipment.

Gauguin was of not more than middle height, but stockily built and of strong physical development. His hair, which later grew thinner and lost much of its coloring, was chestnut inclining towards red, and fell in large straggling masses over a broad but rather low forehead. The eyebrows were arched and gave a skeptical appearance to the eyes, which were heavy-lidded, small and gray-green in color—the eyes of one who has spent many years at

sea. The nose was large, thick and aquiline. A thin drooping mustache, lighter in color than the hair, hung over the mouth, with its large, coarse lips drooping at the corners. The chin was pointed and retreating and, in later life, furnished with a short tufted beard similar in color to the mustache.

After Gauguin's return from the Antilles in 1887 it is the testimony of all who knew him that his skin had become as bronzed as an Indian's, and that he dressed and looked altogether like a sailor. Even his excessive devotion to tobacco, a habit that later was seriously to injure his health, had something sailor-like in it. Gauguin rolled his own cigarettes in the Spanish fashion and smoked commonly a short clay pipe. His hands, too, were not those of an artist but of a seaman—coarse, square and red. Altogether he was in appearance curiously Creole; he did not resemble a Frenchman of France. The dark tint of his skin and the formation of the face and features belied the color of the eyes and hair.



His personal characteristics were unfavorably judged by most of those with whom he came in contact. It must be remembered, however, that he was by nature reserved and even suspicious, as are many people of fundamental genius. He differed from those about him in that he worked by instinct, while they worked according to some conscious method. He therefore obtained out of himself, by means of slow thinking and laborious effort, the knowledge which many have at the beginning. Further, the study and practice of art is in itself so exhausting of physical and emotional fibre as to leave its possessor with little reserve of tact and dissimulation with which to face the world. Finally, Gauguin was shy, actually and by nature shy. People took this shyness for rudeness and this reserve for disdain. And Gauguin was not always unwilling to profit by this misunderstanding. He carefully cultivated his rudeness, both to create an effect and to keep bores at a distance.

As regards his work, he was on the way to find his path, although he never entirely found it, even to the end of his career. His versatility prevented his art from ever becoming fixed and dead, like that of many popular and highly successful painters.

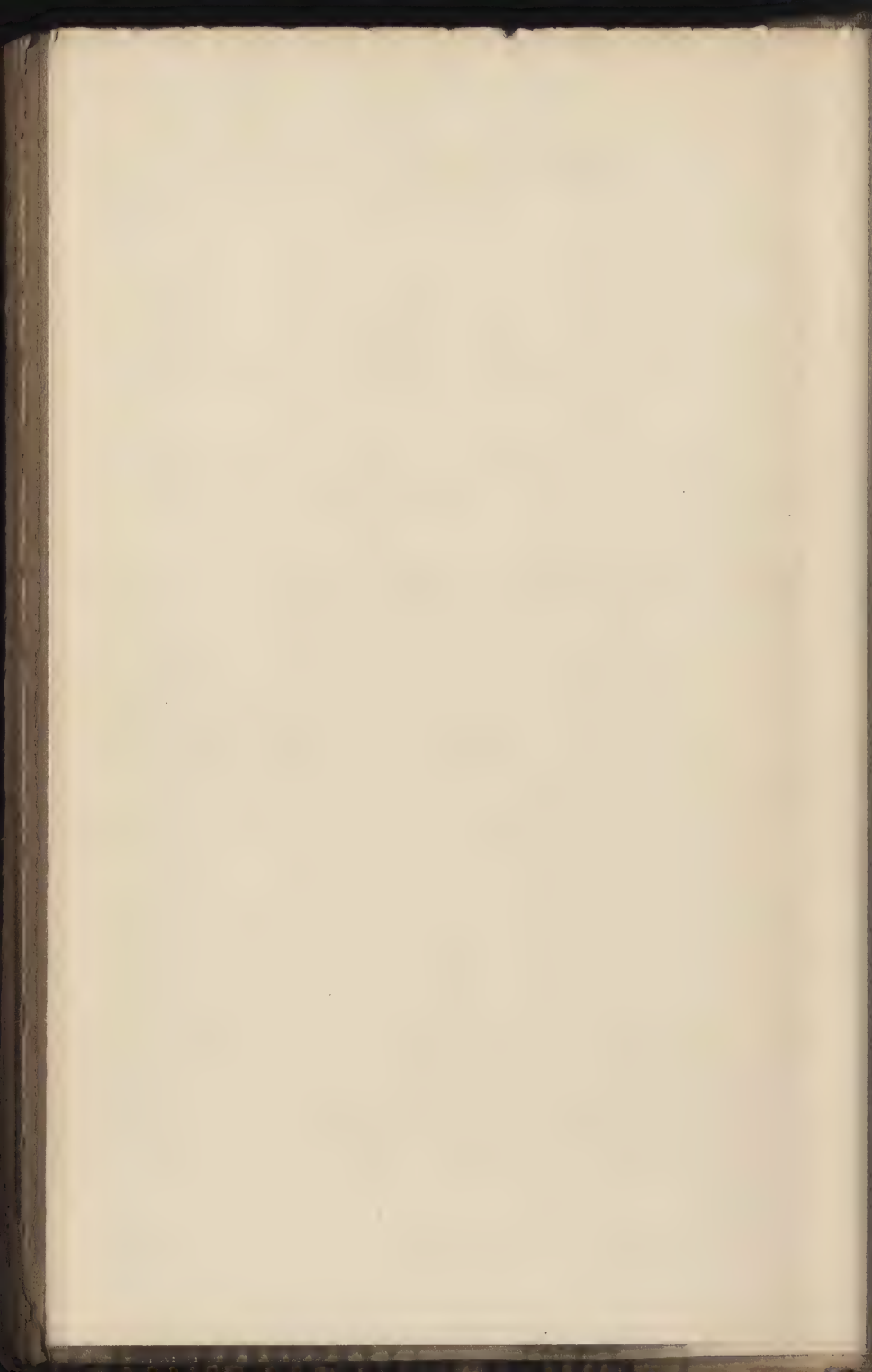
Mention has already been made of his appearance in 1880 among the Impressionists and of the praise bestowed by Huysmans on one of his pictures for its frank realism. This very nude, however, shows Gauguin massing his shadows, making them heavy and dark, which was the direct contrary to Impressionist practice. A year later we find Huysmans complaining of the low and muddy color of his pictures; another proof that the painter was already trying to mass tones, to escape from the division of tones employed by the Impressionist group.

We are safe in assuming also that Gauguin felt already an inward desire to paint nature as he had seen her in the tropics. His early years had shown him the tropics; and the art of the greatest masters,

as well as of the worst daubers, is based on the instinctive knowledge they have obtained during childhood and the use they have made of it in later years. Pissarro, too, had seen the tropics; but they had not in any way influenced his color sense, which, indeed, grew colder and grayer as his years advanced. But he may have had something to do with Gauguin's inclination towards tropical subjects, though the feeling of kinship with Nature which Gauguin brought to such subjects was all his own.

If Gauguin had but known it, there waited for him not the future of fame and fortune of which he dreamed, but seventeen years of life-and-death struggle with actual hunger in a world that gave him neither the means of living nor the slightest encouragement, but only hampered him in every way, so that he was forced to paint his finest decorative pictures on small pieces of board or canvas instead of on great walls. He was to quit his own country, and to go to the ends of the earth, only to find that the

system of civilization possessed by his country, whatever its other advantages, did not permit of an artist to live and enjoy the fruits of his labor. He was finally to sink into an unmarked grave, to be almost forgotten, and to attain to a commercial apotheosis only when no longer able to profit by it. Even if Gauguin could have realized this, it is doubtful if he would have changed his mind. Ready to dare everything, he strode forward into the future.





## PART II: THE STRUGGLE WITH IMPRESSIONISM

1885-1889

### I

WITH the return of Gauguin to Paris there opened for him the second stage of his career, the struggle to maintain himself on the productions of his brush and chisel. During the first stage his character had been formed by the hard experiences of sea-faring and by the comparative leisure and affluence of his epoch of splendor, during which he found time to discuss the principles of art with the best exponents of the latest French tradition. He had not only met and talked with men like Manet, Pissarro, and Cézanne, he also visited the museums of Paris, and did not confine himself to the Louvre, but made a

special study of the Musée Guimet with its collection of art works from the far East, and later of the Trocadero, with its casts of Cambodian sculpture. His stay at Bertin's had been of good service in giving him the mental equipment, the self-education necessary to begin the struggle for artistic independence.

Yet in his case we know far less of what passed in his mind during these important years of development than in the case of most of his contemporaries. "He was the sort of man to be awake to everything new in art that was going on," says one who knew him in this period, "but not to acknowledge indebtedness to anything or anybody." What he absorbed was by instinct; and instinct cautioned him not to share his knowledge with people who might fail to make good use of it.

Amid the noisy chatter of Parisian art-circles he passed silent and unnoted. He rented a studio and began to busy himself with all sorts of experimental projects, par-

ticularly with sculpture. But very shortly his resolution and character were further tested by the new experience of hunger.

For a time he suffered extreme privation. He was forced at last to accept a salary of three francs fifty centimes a day for pasting advertisements on the walls of the Gare du Nord in order to save himself from starvation.

"I have known," he wrote in a small notebook dedicated to his daughter Aline, "extreme misery, that is to say hunger and everything that follows upon hunger. It is nothing, or almost nothing. One grows accustomed to it and, with will-power, one can end by laughing at it. But what is terrible is to be prevented from working, from developing one's intellectual faculties. It is true that suffering sharpens one's ability. But it is necessary not to suffer too much or suffering will kill you.

"With a great deal of pride I have ended by having a great deal of energy, and I have forced myself to be full of will-power.

"Is pride a fault, or must one develop one's pride? I believe pride must be developed. It is the best weapon we have against the human animal that is in us."

This quotation gives us the man entirely. He was one of those who are not to be beaten, one of those who do not turn back. He was to go forward and to maintain himself while seeking a path.

In 1886 he contributed no less than nineteen pictures to an exhibition of the Impressionist group, together with a relief in wood, which seems to foreshadow the later creator of *La Guerre et la Paix*.

Most of these early works of Gauguin seem to have disappeared. Very few can recall seeing one. It is therefore interesting to read the following appreciation by Felix Fenéon, which shows that Gauguin was already traveling far from the formulas that satisfied the other impressionists:—

"The tones of M. Paul Gauguin's pictures are very little separated from each other; because of this, there is in his work a

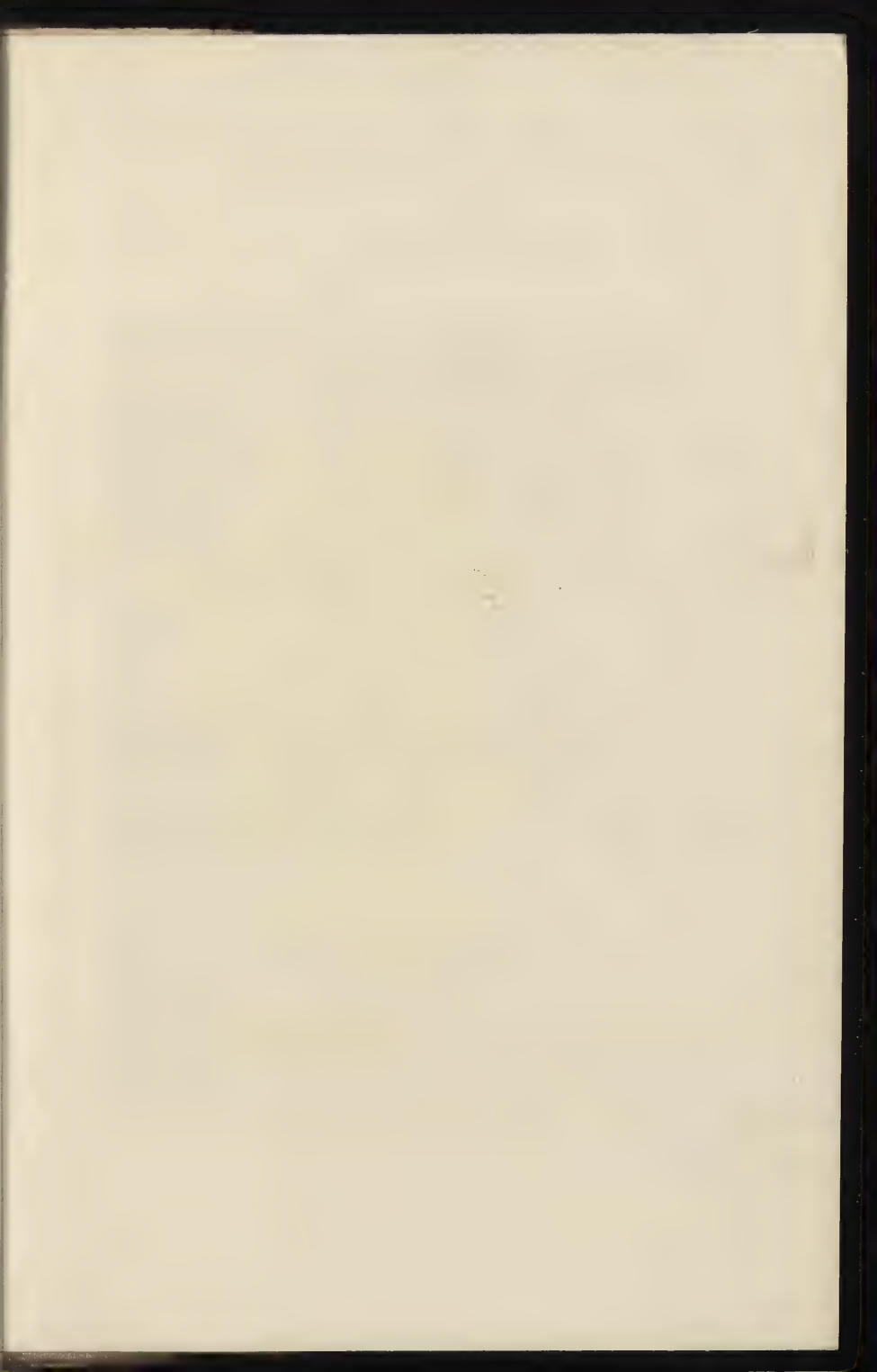
dull harmony. Dense trees rise from the fertile soil, abundant and humid, invade the frame, pursue the sky. The air is heavy. Bricks seen between the trunks indicate a nearby house; things are lying about, muzzles are scattered in the thicket—cows. These reds of roofs and of cattle the artist constantly opposes to his greens and reflects them again in the waters, encumbered with long grasses, which run between the tree-trunks.”

This shows clearly that Gauguin was treating landscape at this period already as a synthesis, a decorative whole and not, like Manet, Pissarro or the Divisionists, as an exercise in the analysis of atmospheric vibration. As for the relief on wood, Fenéon writes:

“On the pear-tree wood, which we regret to see left in monochrome, a naked woman stands out in half relief, her hand to her hair, seated rectangularly in a landscape. This is the only number of sculpture. Nothing in painted wood, in glass-paste, in wax.”



Paris with her art-theories had nothing now to teach Gauguin. He must find his own way, create his own tradition. Aloof alike from the theories of the Impressionists and from those of their successors, the Poin-tillists—theories of the disassociation of tones and of the analytic disintegration of light, based on the scientific treatises of Chevreul and Helmholtz—he was painfully tending back to the old decorative tradition that a picture must be an unit, the harmonious expression of a single emotion. Hunger proved again the best friend of the independent artist. He fled from Paris and sought refuge in the country.





STRUGGLE OF JACOB WITH THE ANGEL

## II

The place of refuge which Gauguin found was the village of Pont-Aven in the district of Finistère in Brittany.

There is no doubt that this chosen spot and its surroundings had upon his art an influence only secondary to that exercised later by Tahiti. Indeed the charm of Tahiti itself was slow to efface this influence.

The Celtic fringe of Europe—Cornwall, the Highlands of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Brittany, Galicia—presents everywhere a great similarity in natural feature and in the character of its inhabitants. The Celt is an outcast. Driven backward by successive waves of civilization and conquest, he has finally occupied those lands which were so unprofitable to his conquerors that he was able to remain in them undisturbed. Long residence in these desolate places has made of him a natural mystic, a conservative,

Perhaps he might never have been anything else had not the nineteenth century—with its railroads and the life-weariness of its cultivated classes—made of him a curiosity. The hordes of tourists, of bad artists, of dealers in journalese, who rave about Brittany, Cornwall, or Ireland as picturesque summer-resorts, show that civilization has obtained its revenge on the savage who prefers to remain a savage.

Paul Gauguin did not assuredly go to Brittany to discover the picturesque. Had he done so his painting would have ranked no higher than the painting of Charles Cottet or of Lucien Simon. His real home as an artist, as he was later to discover, lay elsewhere—under less troubled skies, in the midst of more tropical vegetation. But the gloom, the melancholy inertia, the mystic faith, the simplicity of this land of wind-mills, small trees, granite coasts and menhirs, worked strongly on the yet untamed primitive in him. Stronger still perhaps was the appeal of the sea, the most restless and



yet the most changeless element in nature. Gauguin was in appearance, as in manners, a sailor—the eye, the direct curt speech, the reserved disdain, the freedom of manners, all these in him had been accentuated by his early experiences. In Brittany he found the sea; he found an unspoiled people; he found, above all, repose from the everlasting chatter of art-theories that, like the bubbling of endless bottles of too light champagne, frothed eternally in the cafés of Paris. Brittany gave him greater faith in himself; Brittany began to dispel the nineteenth century skepticism that was slowly stifling him.

His first stay in Pont-Aven was destined to be short. It is chiefly remarkable for the fact that here he was visited by Emile Bernard, then only about seventeen years of age, whose relations with Gauguin and other painters afford matter for so much controversy that they must be examined in detail.

Bernard was the type of infant phenomenon that springs up, mushroom-like, in an

overheated atmosphere of artistic and literary controversy. At the age of sixteen he was writing violently naturalistic and extremely bad poetry. He next went in for painting, raced off to Brittany to see Gauguin, was received with coolness, ran back to Paris. Here he found Van Gogh fresh from Holland and, when Van Gogh in turn went to Arles, became his most industrious correspondent. Later he heard that the crazy old hermit, Paul Cézanne, was living at Aix—so off to Aix went Bernard. More letters were the outcome of the visit.

Meanwhile he progressed in painting from a divisionist and neo-impressionist technique to a facile imitation of Gauguin's Breton style, then to a combination of Cézanne and Gauguin, to conclude with painting of Oriental subjects in a style not so very far removed from that of Gérôme. He imitated everyone in turn, only to end by becoming that drab eclectic thing—what the French call a "pompier" or we an "Academician." Thus he justified Gauguin's

sardonic prophecy that "Bernard would end up something like Benjamin Constant!"

We owe Bernard a debt in that he has preserved for us the beautiful letters which Van Gogh wrote to him, and—more precious debt—that he has given us those rare talks and letters in which that old stoic Cézanne revealed a glimpse of his agony. But we owe Bernard nothing in that he has seen fit to defame the art and character of the man whose style he was the first to copy—Paul Gauguin. But of this more later.

### III

The winter of 1886 found Gauguin again in Paris. Here he met another artist whose life was destined to have upon his an influence quite different from that of Emile Bernard.

This was Vincent Van Gogh, newly arrived from Holland. Gauguin has left on record in a piece of prose called *Les Crevettes Roses* his first impression of Van Gogh, which proves beyond dispute that Gauguin loved Van Gogh and admired him, despite his habitual reserve and the haughty disdain with which he was already looking upon all things European.

At this time Gauguin was still painfully seeking, still patiently and laboriously struggling towards his own self-realization. Van Gogh, although five years younger, had fully realized himself in essence—was, in fact, realized from the beginning. The

difference between them was that Van Gogh was an humble Dutch peasant, with the mystic blend of religion and animality which is common to Flemish and Dutch artists (for example, Breughel, Rubens or Verhaeren), while Gauguin was a Spaniard, hard and aristocratic, but corrupted by cosmopolitan influences and the strain of French blood.

For Van Gogh the future only held the liberating spiritual worship of the sun, which was to raise his art to its highest pitch of lyric ecstasy and to destroy the brain that had created it. For Gauguin the future held a long and stoic struggle with the ironic destiny that left him half-an-European to the end, his work only a broken fragment of what he had dreamed.

It is a pity, in a way, that these men ever met. But their meeting and the drama which was played out later between them, had in it the inevitable quality of Greek tragedy. For the moment their meeting was without result, except that perhaps it woke Gauguin to a realization that to be a

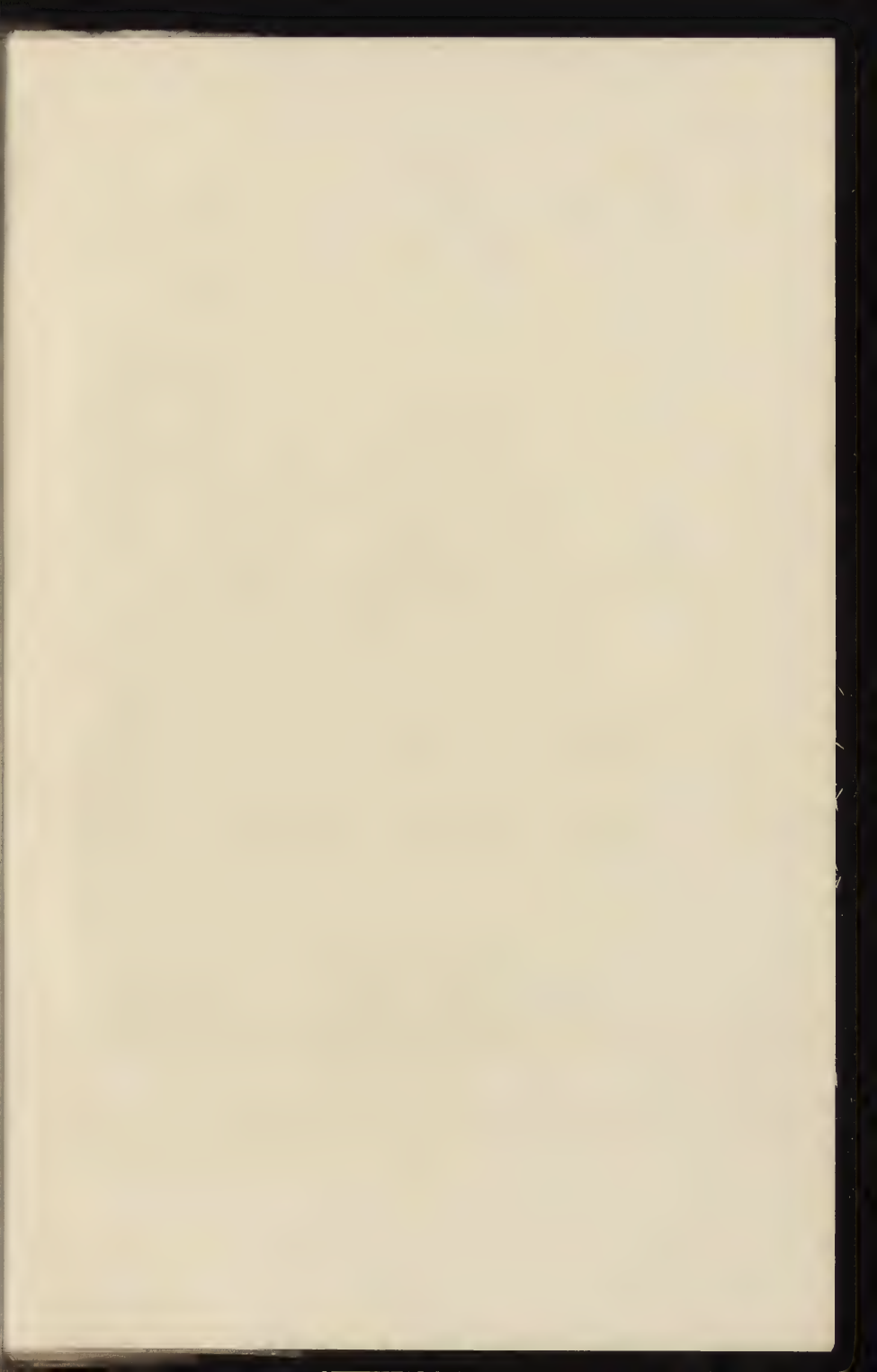


great artist one must love life as well as love art. In short, one must be religious. But where was Gauguin to find his religion?

Certainly not in Paris, the capital of intellectual skepticism. Nor, for the moment, in sleepy and mournful Brittany. The memories of his early initiation into the splendors of the tropics awoke in him and he undertook, in 1887, a voyage to the Martinique in company with a young painter, Charles Laval.

There is no doubt that this journey completely revealed to Gauguin his own primitivism, although it left him for the time an invalid, threatened with dysentery, suffering from constant intestinal pains, and although it brought Laval to the brink of the grave.

If the reader wishes to know something of what Martinique was at this time, he should turn to Lafcadio Hearn's "Two Years in the French West Indies." Hearn, like Gauguin, was a disillusionized cosmopolite, disgusted with the banal artifice, the blatant commercialism, the pedantic and





THE IDOL

Puritanic hypocrisy of our Occidental civilization. Like Gauguin, Hearn found in the West Indies a revelation of a world which had not lost touch with Nature—a world of men who were content to remain, in Nature's eyes, something as ephemeral and as harmonious as the trees, the flowers, the beasts among which they lived. Like Gauguin again, Hearn was nearly destroyed by this vision, but yet kept faith with it to the last.

In the pictures which Gauguin produced during his stay in Martinique, we find the first rude indications of his later manner—the manner of a mystic poet who sees all life, the life of man, of vegetation, of the earth and the sea, as being parallel, harmonious manifestations of the same Divine presence and therefore essentially in unity with each other.

If Gauguin did not realize himself in Martinique, he at least found himself on the road to realization. But the unchecked power of the sun, steadily sapping not only

the white race, but also the race of mixed blood, with which he, like Hearn, felt so much sympathy, banished him from this Eden at the same time as it gave him a hint for the future.

His health demanded a return to France. He came back, bringing with him pictures—experimental, tentative efforts to reconcile the glow and gloom of the tropics with Pissarro's analysis of paler northern sunlight. He brought back also the germ of thousands of other pictures which he, as yet, could not paint. He brought back with him an idea.



#### IV

After seeing the Antilles and returning to Paris, Gauguin was again brought face to face with the problem against which he had already struggled—the problem of his poverty.

He had obtained at Martinique the vision of a new world of art, which he knew he was some day destined to realize. But for the present he had neither lodging and studio, nor resources of any kind. He was forced to live on charity.

Charity came to him in the shape of Emile Schuffenecker, who had also given up finance for a career as artist.

Schuffenecker was not a genius, but he knew ability when he saw it, and opened his doors freely to this needy colleague. It is a pity that Gauguin repaid this generous hospitality of a friend by insulting Schuffenecker as an artist.

Gauguin's relations with his friends are

amongst the most painful episodes of his life. One is almost inclined to think with Emile Bernard that "the basis of Gauguin's character was a deep-seated egoism," or, with Meier-Graefe, that Gauguin was nothing but a great child. Neither of these views is, however, wholly correct.

Gauguin was the son, be it remembered, of a radical journalist and the grandson of a Socialist pamphleteer. Journalism in France is not the same thing as in England. There is scarcely any polite journalism in France. Gauguin himself was always talking, according to Bernard, of art and life needing "the blow of the fist." Paul Déroulède, Edmond Drumont, Henri Rochefort, Octave Mirbeau, Zola, Clemenceau, and other celebrated journalists of the Dreyfus period (the heyday of French journalism) knew quite well what this "blow of the fist" meant, and practiced it upon every opportunity.

Moreover, Gauguin was nearly forty, had knocked about the world a great deal,

banging himself against many sharp corners in the process, and was face to face with want. It is also possible that he felt bound, for the sake of his wife and children, to make as much money as possible. Finally, he believed in himself as an artist, if no one else did. The world had well hammered into him the hard lesson that one must either hold a high opinion of oneself or become an object of contempt. As he put it himself, "Is it necessary to be modest, or, in other words, an imbecile?"

So he accepted the use of Schuffenecker's studio, sold as many of his own pictures as he could, and sneered loudly at Schuffenecker's attempt to paint. Later on we find him accepting similarly Van Gogh's hospitality, irritating Van Gogh to the pitch of madness, and—after Van Gogh's death—sending to Bernard and seeking to oppose the proposed exhibition of Van Gogh's pictures on the ground that Van Gogh was only a madman. And later still, when Van Gogh's reputation began to rise

in public esteem, Gauguin declared that Van Gogh had learned from him and had called him master.

Such traits are deplorable, if we consider Gauguin as an ordinary man. But if we treat genius as ordinary humanity and insist upon it conforming in every particular to ordinary standards, it is quite certain that we will never have any genius worthy of the name. Gauguin sinned in good company, with Michaelangelo who thought Raphael had plotted against him, and with Berlioz who has left on record his opinion of Wagner's music. To understand Gauguin one must share to some extent the opinion of Flaubert—which, incidentally, Browning almost endorses—that the man is nothing, the work is all.

It is not easy to read between the lines of Gauguin's self-imposed reserve and self-determined resolve to shock the bourgeoisie. If we attempt to do so, we find a man so set upon his own path that he was almost without friends. Van Gogh he loved with-

out understanding. Daniel de Monfreid he perhaps loved and understood. The shadowy figure of Tehura, a figure perhaps idealized, was to be the only woman who greatly moved him.

Puvis de Chavannes, an artist to whom Gauguin owed much, similarly held himself aloof from all. So did Degas and Ingres, two other artists of Gauguin's stamp. So in ancient Greece did Sophocles.

The truly strong spirits of this world are not those who exist solely on the surface of things. One can only sympathize with them, share their imaginings through long and patient study. Gauguin was not altogether strong; on some sides he was weak, as he himself admitted. But his work increased in vitality and in strength as his aim became more clear. Schuffenecker's studio was useful to him; he stayed in Paris just long enough to sell as many pictures as he could and to copy Manet's *Olympia*, a picture he greatly admired. Then once more he took the road to Brittany.



## V

Despite the fact that Gauguin had, before leaving Paris, held his first one-man show and had actually sold a few pictures, his general situation was not improved. He was now heavily in debt, and his health, undermined at Martinique, remained bad.

He was at an age at which most men find themselves obliged to take stock of the past and to calculate their chances for the future. In Gauguin's case the chances were very small. He was crushed by his own impotence to realize the art he had dreamed.

It was at this juncture that Vincent Van Gogh, now at Arles, came forward and offered him a lodging, despite the fact that he himself could not sell his own pictures and was entirely dependent on the self-sacrificing efforts of his brother Theodore.

For a time Gauguin did not respond to

Van Gogh's generous offer to share their fortunes in common. But he sent his own portrait to Vincent, a gloomy, powerful piece of painting which, in the opinion of some, so startlingly resembles Robert Louis Stevenson—like Gauguin a wanderer, but with what a difference! To Vincent this portrait suggested a prisoner, with its yellow flesh and deep blue shadows. He was more than ever determined to draw Gauguin out of the slough of despond into which he was falling, and to work together with him for the better establishment of both their reputations.

One can only admire Van Gogh for this decision. An artist of a childlike simplicity of soul, a combination of Don Quixote, the Good Samaritan and that Jesus of Nazareth whom he loved, Van Gogh was even greater as a man than as an artist. But Gauguin was, as he knew himself later, greater as an artist than as a man. It was natural for him to accept the invitation of a man whom he knew, after all, very slightly, be-

cause he saw in this acceptance possible advantages to himself.

Van Gogh's enthusiasm was unfortunately not backed, as was Gauguin's, by a strong reserve of nervous strength. His was one of those souls whose longing for spiritual reality followed inevitably the mystic path traced by William Blake:—

I will go down to self-annihilation and to eternal  
death  
Lest the Last Judgment come and find me un-  
annihilate,  
And I be seiz'd and given into the hands of my  
own selfhood.

Gauguin's path tended to a different goal and followed the way foreseen by Whitman:—

O, to struggle against odds, to meet enemies un-  
daunted!  
To be entirely alone with them, to find how much  
one can stand  
To look strife, torture, prison, popular odium face  
to face,  
To mount the scaffold, to advance to the muzzles  
of guns with perfect nonchalance,  
To be indeed a God!

Van Gogh was a lyric painter. His desire was to lose himself in the ecstasy of the divine. Gauguin was a narrative, an epic painter. His aim was to grow to divine stature through self-realization.

What could there be in common between the fervent admirer of Rembrandt, Delacroix, Monticelli, Ziem, and the brooding, patient workman who was building up his art on the classic tradition of Ingres, Cézanne and Degas? Surely even less than between Michaelangelo and Tintoretto.

A drama between these men was inevitable. It was not slow in declaring itself.<sup>1</sup> Of what actually occurred we have only Gauguin's account, of how Van Gogh first attacked him, and then strove to take his own life.

Van Gogh, upon whose shattered nervous organism the shock had spent itself, went voluntarily into a lunatic asylum at Arles, where, as his grip on life grew weaker under

<sup>1</sup> Gauguin and Van Gogh were actually together from the 20th October to the 23d December, 1888.

the pressure of the inner flame that devoured him, he painted visions of worlds tortured by the sun. Gauguin returned to Brittany, as he said, "armed against all suffering." But he had seen something. In striving to paint Van Gogh's portrait he had seen a vision, once again to quote his own words, of "Jesus preaching goodness and humility." And perhaps, in Vincent's hour of agony, while he lay bloodless and inanimate on the bed in that little room which he had loved and had painted so lovingly, Gauguin had another vision—of the sombre Garden of Gethsemane.

Thus maybe there was awakened still more clearly in his spirit that desire for harmony between the flesh and the soul, between nature and God, between the earth and the stars that hang over the earth, which he was to seek desperately to the last and strive to realize, despite the baseness of that other part in him, the civilized, unprimitive part, which strove merely to destroy the harmony and to smile at its work of baseness.



## PART III: THE SCHOOL OF PONT-AVEN

1889-1891

### I

**I**N 1889 there opened in Paris on the Champ-de-Mars the Universal Exposition, to celebrate the centennial of the taking of the Bastille. Of this exhibition and of the palace built to house it, nothing now remains except the melancholy Eiffel Tower.

The pictures admitted to the exhibition were, rather naturally, of a kind sanctioned by academic officialdom. Wherefore visitors who happened to patronize the Café Volpini near the entrance were doubtless startled to find upon the walls a hundred pictures of a kind calculated to shock all their susceptibilities in art matters. Their perplexity cannot have been greatly les-

sened by the receipt of a catalogue bearing this title: "Catalogue of the Exposition of Pictures of the Impressionist and Synthet-icist Group, held on the Premises of M. Volpini, at the Champ-de-Mars, 1889."

The exhibitors were people of whom the respectable patrons of the Café Volpini had for the most part never heard. Their names were:—E. Schuffenecker, Emile Bernard, Charles Laval, Louis Anquetin, Louis Roy, Léon Fauché, Georges Daniel, Ludovic Nemo (a pseudonym of Bernard's) and lastly, Paul Gauguin. Lithographs, printed in black upon yellow paper and not less extraordinary than the pictures, were also visible upon request. These were by Bernard and Gauguin.

The result of this exhibition was that the public laughed, the papers protested, the young students of art in the various ateliers of Paris were stimulated to furious discussion. But a few spirits, more venturesome or more prophetic, took the trouble to test the new ideas. A few, chief among them

Sérusier of the Academie Julian, even set out to visit the birthplace of the new movement, a lonely inn kept by a family of the name of Gloanec at Le Poldu, a short distance from Pont-Aven.

A brief survey of the history of Synthetism is necessary to an understanding of the theories of the new school. Here we enter upon debatable ground. It has already been said that the chief opponents of the academicism of Cabanel and Bougereau were the Impressionists. Their movement was already through its second phase and entering upon its third. The earliest of the Impressionists, led by Manet, insisted that a picture was only nature seen through a temperament; in other words, that a picture must be naturalistic. This doctrine found parallel literary expression in the writings of the de Goncourts, de Maupassant and Zola. The first phase in Impressionism was therefore synthetic and maintained a belief in form.

It was succeeded by an analytical phase,

based upon the application to color of the scientific theories of light, of Rood, Chevreuil and Helmholtz. To Claude Monet, the founder of this new school of Impressionism, nothing mattered in a picture but the atmosphere. Form was abandoned.

After Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Guillaumin, a new group, of whom the chief were Seurat and Signac, attempted to combine the tenets of their two sets of predecessors. They retained formal composition but broke up color into minute points or dots. This third generation of Impressionists were originally termed Neo-Impressionists but now, more frequently, Pointillists.

Three artists stood out against the tendency towards scientific theory. Puvis de Chavannes had, within the very precincts of the official salon, created an art based on something wholly distinct, alike from the photographic and frigid eclecticism of Cabanel and Bougereau and from the work of both Manet and Monet. Puvis was a

decorator who could think and paint only in terms of walls. He had achieved, after a long struggle, a decorative synthesis of his own, based upon the ruthless simplification of masses, contours and coloring. Reserved, cold, solitary, he had emptied his art of all rhetorical emphasis and in his old age was tending closer and closer to the methods of Giotto, that father of all European painting.

Paul Cézanne, the hermit of Aix, had faced the problem of painting with the Impressionist palette while preserving the mass structure of his true spiritual ancestors—the Venetians and El Greco. As a result he was thought to be mad and even considered by some to be a myth, for he lived far from Paris and had for long enough sent no pictures to be exhibited. Finally, Degas, associating himself with the Impressionists at the outset, had been careful to preserve the classic line and composition of Ingres, who might be called the last of Florentines. Degas was considered an artist of small importance because, unlike Manet, he scorned



to give himself airs. He lived a retired life in Paris, and did not exhibit.

These three men—Puvis de Chavannes, Cézanne and Degas—had, through their own inner necessity, become syntheticists. But no one of them preached Syntheticism, because their adherence to the creed was unconscious. The doctrine was first voiced by the men who exhibited with Paul Gauguin at the Cafe Volpini in 1889, who lived and worked with him at the Gloanec inn, near Pont-Aven. It was from these men that the reaction against Impressionism started, a reaction which, in its turn, was destined to provoke another reaction towards the theories of mathematical and analytical abstraction of line, color and form, which we know as Cubism, Futurism and Vorticism. It was these men surrounding Gauguin, who forged the last living link in the chain of art tradition which goes back through Giotto and Cimabue to the Byzantine mosaics, and, through these, to the first essays in art of cave-men and savages. With Cubism, Fu-

## HIS LIFE AND ART 81

turism and Vorticism we may be witnessing the beginning of a new tradition. With Gauguin and his fellows we see the renaissance of an old one.

## II

As early as 1886, in an article in the *Revue Independante*, the well-known critic Eduard Dujardin had spoken of a group calling themselves the Cloissonists, who painted in flat patches of tone, divided from each other by black lines.

Cloisonnism, as the name indicates, was borrowed from the Japanese. But as a method of painting, it had been derived less from cloisonné enamel than from the technique of the Japanese color-print artists. The artistic gods of the Cloissonists were Hokusai, Hiroshige, Utamaro. It may be remembered that since 1865 men like Zola, Manet, Monet, Whistler, the de Goncourts—in short the entire generation of the naturalists—had collected these color prints, written about them, talked about them.

Gauguin himself, when he returned to Paris at the close of this year 1889, pinned a frieze of Hokusai and Utamaro prints round the walls of his studio.

But the existence of this somewhat baroque and exotic school of Cloissonism, of which the leader was Anquetin (later ranked with the Syntheticians), does not fully explain the use of Synthetism with its greater insistence upon decorative unity, and its clearer affinities to the work of the Italian primitives.

As to the origin of Synthetism we have divergent statements from contemporary witnesses.

The English artist, A. S. Hartrick, who was studying in Paris from 1886 to 1889 and who knew personally both Gauguin and Van Gogh, ascribes the Synthetic theory to Gauguin in these terms:—

“From a study of thirteenth century glass he (Gauguin) got an idea of design and color which exactly suited his state of development, and he then proceeded to

translate it into an art of his own, using oil paint as a vehicle." <sup>1</sup>

Of similar opinion is the well known French artist and writer, Maurice Denis, whose work has done so much to popularise Gauguin. He declares in his book "Theories," <sup>2</sup> that Gauguin was the "incontestable originator" and master of the new movement, to which he gives two names: Neo-Traditionism and Symbolism. In the first account which he wrote of the movement in 1890, an account obtained from the lips of Paul Sérusier, one of the earliest of Gauguin's disciples after 1889, Denis includes the following interesting paragraph:

"Did not Paul Gauguin originate this ingenious and unpublished history of modeling?

"At the beginning there was the pure arabesque, as little deceptive of the eye as possible; a wall is empty; cover it with sym-

<sup>1</sup> "Post-Impressionism," by A. S. Hartrick. *Imprint*, May, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> Paris, l'Occident, 1912.



metrical spots of form, harmonious in color:—stained glass, Egyptian pictures, Byzantine mosaics.

“From this comes the painted bas-relief:—metopes of the Greek temple, the church of the Middle Ages.

“Then the attempt to attain to the ornamental deception of the eye practised in Antiquity is resumed in the fifteenth century by the Italian primitives, who replace the painted bas-relief by paintings modeled to imitate bas-relief, but in other respects preserve the first idea of decorative unity. Recall also under what conditions Michaelangelo, a sculptor, decorated the Sistine ceiling.

“Perfection of this modeling; modeling in high-relief. This leads from the first academy of the Caracchi to our decadence.”

Emile Bernard holds a contrary opinion. His view was originally published in the *Mercure de France* and reasserted in his preface to the letters written to him by Van Gogh.<sup>1</sup> Bernard, who revolted from the

<sup>1</sup> Paris, Vollard, 1911.

Atelier Cormon with Anquetin, had, as we have seen, been repulsed by Gauguin in 1886. After a brief return to Paris he went off to Saint-Briac, where he covered the walls of the inn with frescoes and painted the windows, in imitation of stained-glass, employing essence of turpentine as a medium. In 1888, before Gauguin came to Arles, Bernard was brought into contact with him again through the mediation of Theodore Van Gogh and, although young enough to be Gauguin's son (being about twenty at this time), shared with him the honors of the Volpini exhibition.

Bernard claims that he, and he alone, invented Syntheticism, and bases his claim on the evidence of the pictures (all dated) which Gauguin painted previous to 1888, and in which Gauguin was still definitely Impressionist in technique. He maintains that Gauguin abruptly changed his style after the second meeting in 1888, when he first saw what his younger rival had been doing.

Furthermore, Bernard contends that this style was solely based upon the application of Cézanne's discoveries in technique.

Against these contentions there are three objections to be made.

In the first place it is known that Gauguin, during his stay in Martinique in 1887, painted pictures that are undeniably essays in syntheticism. Martinique showed Gauguin the impossibility of painting tropic sunlight by means of the Impressionistic division of tones. Always purely intuitive as an artist, Gauguin began to realize at Martinique, however vaguely, that one cannot reproduce the natural decomposition of light by the artificial decomposition of color attempted by Pissarro and the other Impressionists. He therefore sought to translate sunlight into color by simplifying and exaggerating the contrast of colors.

In the second place, Bernard's argument leaves unexplained why it was not he, but Gauguin, who after 1888 painted those mag-

nificent pictures *Le Christ Jaune*, *Le Christ Vert* and *La Vision après le Sermon*<sup>1</sup> and carved the two superb bas-reliefs *Soyez Amoureuses et vous serez Heureuses* and *Soyez Mystérieuses*. Moreover, the careful reader of Van Gogh's letters to his brother will find that throughout '88 and '89 Bernard stood in relation to Gauguin as a pupil to a master. Finally, even if Bernard's contention be partially true and if his own essays did induce Gauguin to reject the last vestiges of Impressionism, his story fails to account for the masterly grasp of Synthetic Symbolism shown by Gauguin immediately after their second meeting.

It is quite impossible to trace to Cézanne's essays in Synthetic Impressionism the more severely linear and decorative design of either Bernard or Gauguin. Cézanne, later on, even went so far as to assert that Gauguin had misunderstood him. Therefore it is clear that the opinions of A. S. Hartrick and of Maurice Denis better fit the facts.

<sup>1</sup> Now known as *La Lutte de Jacob avec l'Ange*.

Gauguin was the sole originator of the Synthetic style. That style was derived, perhaps mainly, from the careful study of thirteenth century glass, which does perfectly what Gauguin wished to do: translate the effect of sunlight into luminous color. But it was also derived from Egyptian painting, Byzantine mosaics and the Kakemonos of the Japanese. In short, it was as complete a rejection of Impressionism as possible and a return to the linear arabesque and decorative spacing of balanced color and form practiced by the primitives of all times and preserved, in the nineteenth century, in the works of artists whom Gauguin admired: Ingres, Puvis de Chavannes, Cézanne and Degas.



### III

The exhibition at the Café Volpini brought notoriety to Gauguin. Various young artists, wearying of the academic "receipt for art"—the phrase is Gauguin's—which they were being taught in the ateliers of Paris, took the road for Pont-Aven. Among these were Paul Sérusier, Chamailard, and the Dutchman, De Haahn.

Acting under the influence of these, and especially under that of Sérusier, whose mind was metaphysical and filled with Neo-Platonic mysticism, Gauguin attempted to become the teacher of a definite doctrine. Hitherto he had been an artist of the type of Ingres, working purely intuitively, with one eye upon tradition and another upon nature. But his new pupils were eager for a theory, a formula, and a formula this hater of the dogmatic attempted to create.

Artists are singularly unhappy in their attempts to explain themselves. Whistler is not the only example of an artist who might have been greater had he not wasted so much time in controversy. The public always takes too literally the efforts of an artist to analyze his own methods. All art is a synthesis, and no artist can be at the same time synthetic and analytical.

Gauguin was no exception to this rule. Take for example, his often-quoted statement about the use of primary colors:—

“Always use colors of the same origin. Indigo is the best basis. It becomes yellow in saltpeter, red in vinegar. You can obtain it at any chemist’s. Keep to these three colors.”

Gauguin himself did not follow this precept. An examination of his palette shows that it was arranged thus, from left to right:—ultramarine, silver white, emerald green, veronese green, yellow ochre, burnt sienna, yellow chrome, vermilion, and crimson lake. No artist needs to be told that many of these

colors are dangerously fugitive, whether used pure or in mixture.

So with another celebrated saying: "Seek harmony and not contrast, the agreement and not the clash of color." This saying not only goes contrary to the previously quoted remark on the use of primary colors, but is opposed to those equally famous dicta: "Does that trunk of a tree seem to you blue? Paint it as blue as possible," and, "A mile of green, is more green than half a mile."

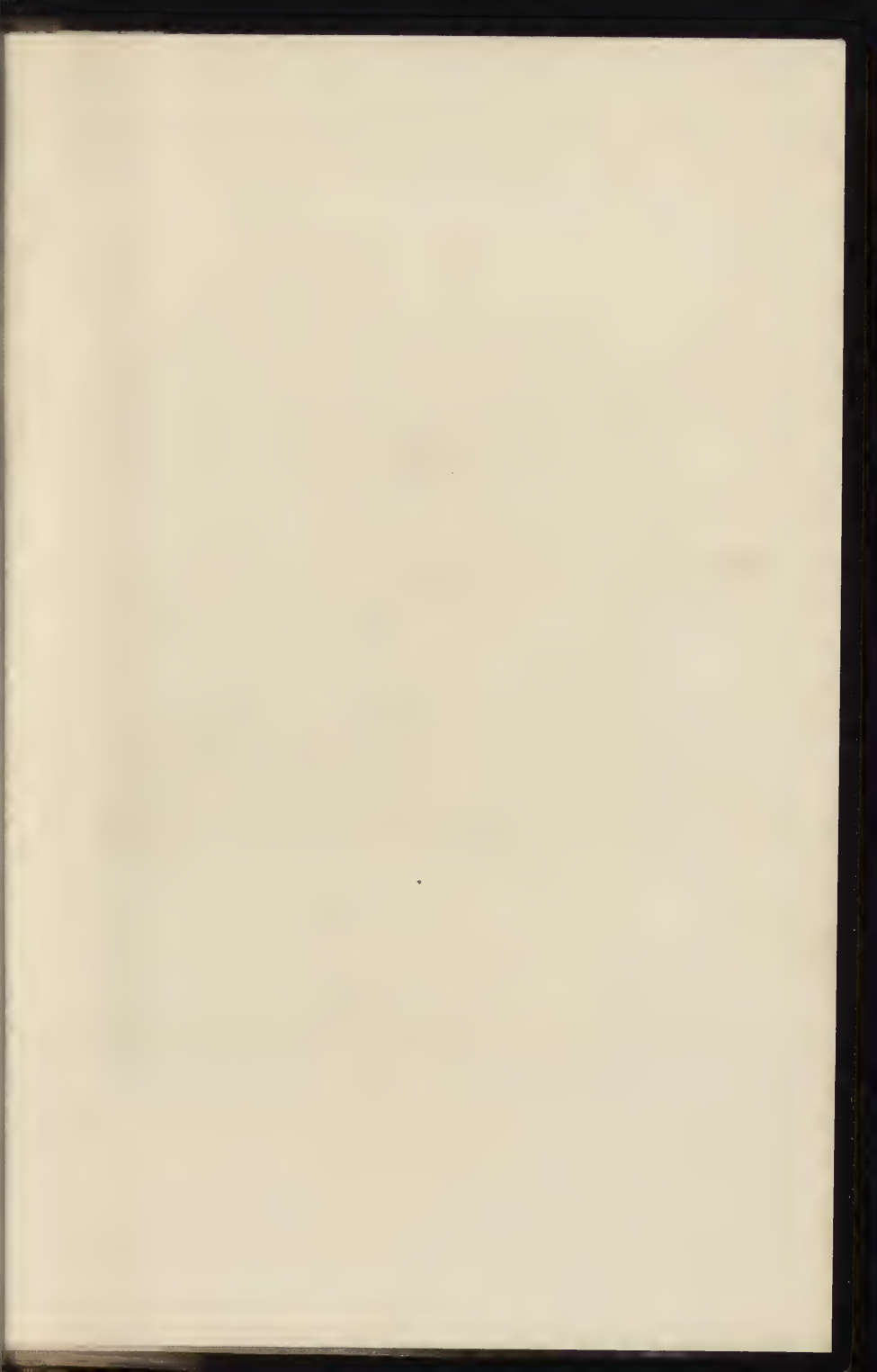
It is therefore more valuable to summarize the main lines of Gauguin's teaching than to quote this or that paradoxical remark. Gauguin was not a man holding a high-school debate on theory, but a creator. He refused even to be called a decorator, he preferred the title of artisan. He declared outright that he had no technique. "Or perhaps I have one, but very vagabond, very elastic, according to the way I feel when I awaken in the morning, a technique which I apply to my own liking in order to express

my thought, without taking account of the truth of Nature, externally apparent. People think nowadays that all the technical means of painting are exhausted. I do not believe it, if I am to judge by the numerous observations which I have made and put into practice. . . . Painters have still much to discover."

Gauguin therefore boldly called his pupils anarchists and left to them this remark: "Do what you please, so long as it is intelligent." This did not prevent him from having a great respect for art tradition. He knew that tradition is not a "recipe for making art," but the sum-total of collective human intelligence working in the past on the same problems that face the artists of to-day. He realized that the essential substance of art is always the same. Art is an eternal renewal of this substance. "The artist is not born of a single unity. If he adds a new link to the chain already begun, it is much. The artist is known by the quality of his transposition."

The "transposition" that he himself strove for may be clearly read in his pictures. He strove incessantly for a renewal of the decorative art of the great Venetians, by blending the Venetian glow of color with the calm line of Primitive and especially of Egyptian Primitive design. His problem was essentially the same as that of Puvis de Chavannes, the problem of how to cover a flat wall space with design and color so as to leave it still essentially a wall and not, as Veronese and Tiepolo left it, an optically deceptive piece of stage-scenery. Puvis had solved the problem by the artificial means of lowering his scale of colors and by simplifying his drawing. Gauguin solved his by the elimination of modeling, and of graduations of tone, and by reducing his drawing to the strongest possible arabesque of outline. In everything he sought for the essential form, the form that contains all the other inessential forms. As Sérusier puts it: "The synthetic theory of art consists in reducing all form to the smallest possible number of







TAHITIAN WOMEN

component forms:—straight lines, arcs of a circle, a few angles, arcs of an ellipse.” And to express this form he sought for the most harmonious balance of color. Maurice Denis says:—“Recall that a picture, before being a war-horse, a nude or some anecdote, is essentially a flat surface covered with colors arranged in a certain order.”

Therefore and above all, Gauguin told his pupils not to draw from the model, but from memory. He admitted that it was useful for young painters to have a model, as all knowledge of facts could only be obtained from the study of models. But he added that it was better to draw a curtain before the model while painting it. One of his pupils declared: “We went into the country to paint seascapes and to the seashore to do landscapes.”

Gauguin’s teaching in this respect exactly agrees with the methods practiced for centuries by the great Chinese and Japanese painters. He would have enjoyed that story of a Chinese painter, who was sent out

by the Emperor to paint the most celebrated landscape views in the Empire, and who returned without having painted anything. When the Emperor asked him: "But where are your pictures?" he replied: "I have them here"—and pointed to his forehead. Gauguin, with his hatred of copying either from nature or from the masters of the past, would also have appreciated the Chinese idea of a "copy"—a free rearrangement of old material according to one's temperament.

Lastly, he counseled his pupils not to paint movement but repose. "Let everything you do breathe peace and calm of soul. Avoid all animated attitudes. Each of your figures should be perfectly static. Give everything a clear outline." This counsel sounds strange to ears deafened by the tumult of modern life and by the clamorous theories of Cubists, Futurists and Vorticists. But to Gauguin it was the basis of his own mystical religion. He gave it to the world, however, not for this reason, but be-

cause he realized that painting to be decorative must be architectural. He himself was a builder, an artisan. In Brittany he painted the walls and windows of the inn where he lived; he made furniture, carved and ornamented a pair of wooden sabots for himself, worked at bas-reliefs, decorated pottery. Movement, restlessness, would have but troubled the lines of that ideal building, which, even then, he was erecting in his dreams.

Such was the doctrine of Paul Gauguin. It may seem strange that such ideas could have ever been considered revolutionary. In the Far East at all events, they had been the commonplaces of art for centuries. Revolutionary or not, Gauguin went on his way undisturbed. From an examination of his letters, and of the statements of those who knew him, the fact emerged that this "anarchist" preserved throughout his life a great respect for artists of the past. Rembrandt especially, in his mystical and visionary phase, appealed to him and Rembrandt's



influence may be traced in more than one of Gauguin's Tahitian pictures. Velazquez, Rubens, Proudhon, Corot, Whistler—Gauguin was able to learn something from all these men as well as from Memling and Holbein. As for his pupils, the measure of the intelligence they displayed in following his precepts may be judged by the fact that Gauguin remarked about one of them: "His faults are not sufficiently accentuated for him to be considered a master," and by the fact that the first synthetic picture of another was, according to Maurice Denis, painted on the lid of a cigar box!

## IV

It is in the works of this period that we must seek for a solution of Gauguin's mystic doctrine and for an explanation of the struggle that went on in his soul: a struggle that was solved finally by his denial of civilization and affirmation of pagan savagery at Tahiti.

Gauguin, as has been seen, was not naturally but only deliberately a teacher of others. Especially in his intimate and personal concerns, he commonly guarded an air of defiant reserve. In the matter of views on art, he contented himself with the expression of dogmatic and paradoxical opinions which, if disputed, were merely affirmed with greater violence.

It is related of him that, if any one persisted in holding an opinion contrary to his own, Gauguin would reply only by an oblique glance from those cold gray eyes—

an answer that usually reduced the speaker to an embarrassed silence.

Nevertheless, we owe to the fortunate preservation of various fragmentary notes, made in the solitude of his last desperate years, indications of what Gauguin's religious and political opinions were. Here are some of them:—

“If I gaze before me into space, I have a vague sense of the Infinite; nevertheless I am the conclusion of something that has been begun. I understand then, that there has been a beginning and that there will be no end.

“In this I do not possess the explanation of a mystery, but merely the mysterious sense of this mystery—and this sensation is intimately linked to the belief in an eternal life, promised by Jesus.

“But then, if we in ourselves are not the beginning when we come into the world, it is necessary to believe, with the Buddhists, that we have always existed.

“A change of skin.

"All this is very strange.

"The unfathomable mystery remains what it has always been and what it is, unfathomable. God does not belong to the scholar, the logician. He belongs to the poets, to their dreams. He is the symbol of Beauty, Beauty itself."

From these and other jottings we can understand what was passing in Gauguin's mind when he painted the pictures: *Le Christ Jaune* and *Le Christ au Jardin d'Oliviers*; when he carved the contrasted bas-reliefs: *Soyez Amoureuses* and *Soyez Mystérieuses*; when he drew the lithographs: *La Cigale et les Fourmis*, and *Léda* which bears the defiant inscription "Honi soit qui mal y pense."

Gauguin was a mystic who sought instinctively for religious illumination, not in the systems of philosophers and theologians, but in nature and in man. Among the higher types of civilized man he saw only a false system of morality, politics and religion, which elevated the wealthy above the level

of the rest of humanity and forbade to the thinker, the artist, the independent workman, the very right to live.

Against the organized materialism of the nineteenth century, he recognized in Jesus Christ a revolt and a protest; but a revolt and a protest that had failed. Humanity had not yet produced, save by exception, the higher type of man, the man capable of "selling all and giving to the poor," the man chosen "to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." A terrible epoch, he foresaw, was coming in Europe for the next generation: an epoch where the tyranny of money would destroy mankind.

Therefore, in contemplating Christ, he was moved by a sense of despair, of the futility of this sacrifice. His attitude to Christianity became purely Protestant. Across his pictures there moves no gracious shadow of the beneficent Virgin, sharing with humanity the joys and sorrows of maternity.

In *Le Christ Jaune* he gives us the sym-



bol of a faith which has proved impotent to elevate mankind to its level. *Le Christ au Jardin d'Oliviers* echoes the awful cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The terrible little picture, *Les Misères Humaines* sums up in its two figures the despair and hypocrisy of our vaunted civilization. Even the later Tahitian *Birth of Christ* renders nothing but the physical anguish and exhaustion of maternity. In the *Ia Orana Maria*, or the Salutation to Mary, the Virgin is represented merely as a happy human mother.

Nature, on the other hand, seen by him luxuriant and unfettered, as at Martinique, taught him the uselessness of revolt, struggle and effort, the need of fatalism, of resignation. He grew to believe that man was better, more rational, more harmonious when no longer struggling against the inexorable laws of birth, begetting, and death. Thus in his art he aimed at repose, the quietism of the Buddhists. His knowledge of Buddhism was not deep—indeed in his eyes,

Buddhism, too, was a vain revolt against nature—but his respect for Buddhistic doctrine remained greater than his respect for Christianity. At the bottom of his soul there dwelt an old, old thought, the essence of all paganism: “Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we may die.”

As he put it later in the pages of his Tahitian recital:—

“To the eyes of Tagatha (the God) the most splendid glories of kings and their ministers are but dust and spittle:

“To his eyes, purity and impurity are like the dance of the six serpents:

“To his eyes, the search for the Way of Buddha is like the coming of flowers.”

It is only by meditating long on this disillusioned mysticism of a man who was never more than half an European, that we are able to understand how the same mind could have conceived the exasperated sensuality of the bas-relief, *Soyez Amoureuses et vous serez Heureuses* and the somber despair of *Le Christ au Jardin d'Oliviers*. That mind,

as we have seen, was neither wholly Christian or Pagan—though the untamed Pagan element in it was destined slowly to get the better of the more refined Christian side. Therefore it is useless to ask ourselves whether Gauguin as an artist, displayed more of the Classic tradition than of the Gothic. Gothic as well as Classical strains remained mingled in him up to the last. Throughout his work there runs a longing—obscure, tormented, and ultimately foiled—for a natural religion: a religion that would reconcile man with nature in one harmony, a religion, which, like the rest of his striving, would be a synthesis.

## V

By the end of the year 1889, Gauguin's name had acquired a certain renown, and he naturally gravitated back to Paris. Being however still without resources, he took residence once more with Emile Schuffenecker.

At that period, the literary and artistic school which had produced naturalism and impressionism was growing rapidly old-fashioned. Paris was on the verge of her æsthetic nineties. A small group of writers, chief of whom were Verlaine, Mallarmé, and Huysmans, had proclaimed a sort of revolt against the nineteenth century, and had been, in consequence of their love for the remote past, at first labelled Decadents. This title was soon abandoned for the better designation of Symbolists.

Gauguin appeared to the smaller fry of Symbolism as a sort of hero. Here was a man whose revolt was something not ficti-

tious. He had definitely broken away from his own commercial surroundings. He had defiantly ruptured his own family ties. He had abolished Impressionist science and had sought to restore art to its primitive condition, revealing in the process the inexhaustible strength and vitality of peasant and popular art. His appearance amongst them, in a sailor's jersey, a sailor cap, sailor's trousers, and carved wooden shoes, excited a sensation. He became to the facile crowd of hero-worshippers and hangers-on, a sort of symbol.

Some critics have stated that Gauguin's head was turned by this adulation, but in reality, under a new veneer of affectation, he remained what he had always been. No man was less fitted for living in the midst of cultivated society than he. For a time, during that strange epoch of his financial career, he had indeed become, to outward seeming, largely an European; but this was merely on the surface and had completely vanished in the course of his later vagabond-



age. An invincible shyness and indisposition to reveal himself to others were in him, masked by an appearance of sullen reserve and discourtesy. This shyness disappeared when he was with children, peasants, or natives. But to every one else Gauguin attempted to be as rude as possible, in order to keep them at a distance. And, generally, he succeeded.

It is small wonder then that Schuffenecker shortly found his guest again intolerable, and that Gauguin had to seek out a more modest lodging. Schuffenecker is scarcely to be pitied. He seems never to have realized that Gauguin was the sort of man whom it was worth while trying to love and understand. In losing Gauguin, he lost the one thing that was ever likely to bring him fame, the reputation which his studio had already acquired in the eyes of certain amateurs, as housing Gauguin's collection of pictures and sculptures by himself, by Cézanne, Van Gogh, and Odilon Redon.

Gauguin shortly found a better friend—

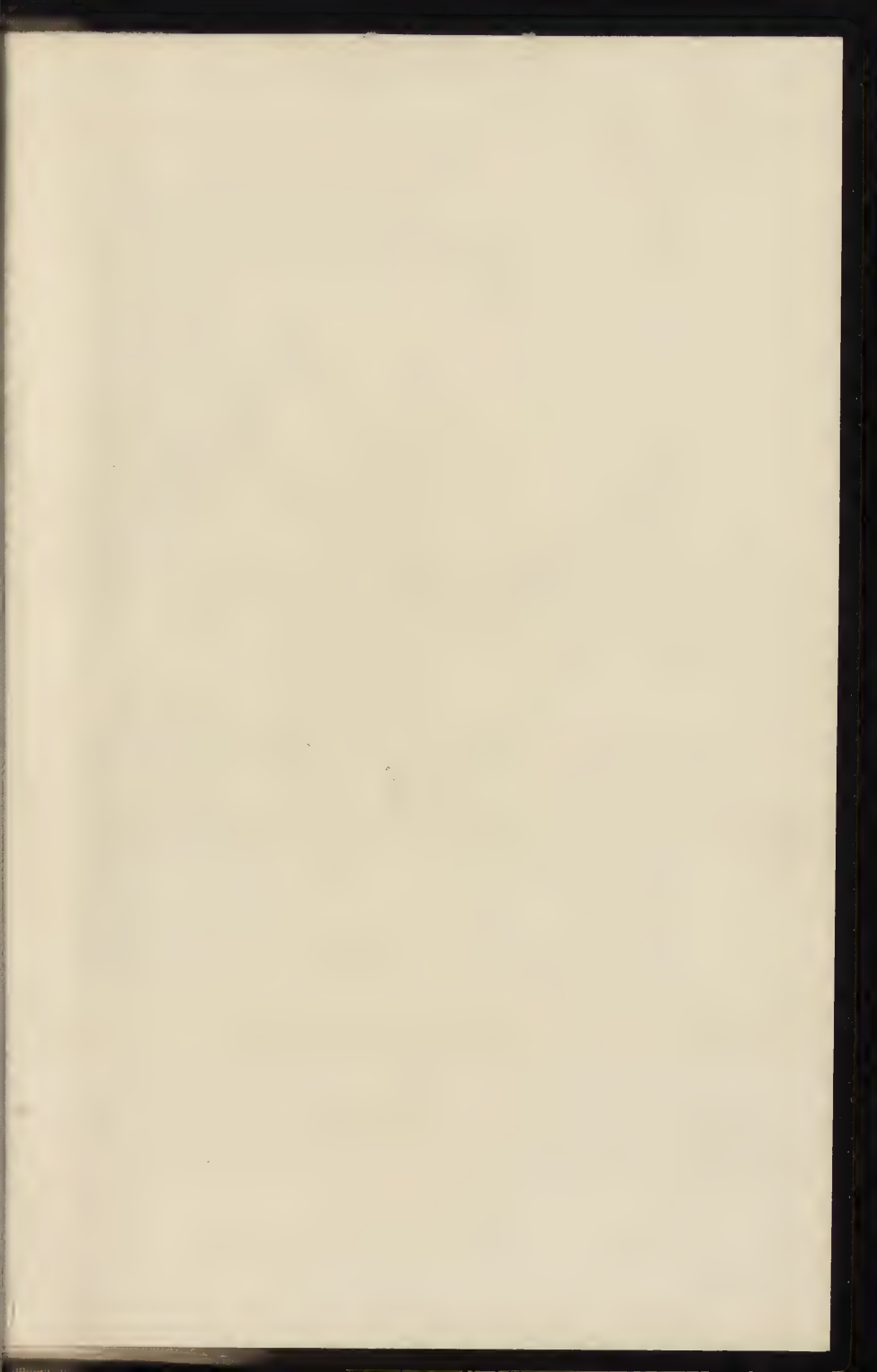
perhaps the only real friend he ever had—who was willing to give him the use of a studio. This was Daniel de Monfreid, who had, incidentally, under the name George Daniel taken part in the Volpini exhibition.

It is worthy of note that what brought them together was not a community of taste in matters of art, but a common love of the sea.

De Monfreid, like Gauguin, had been a sailor. He was a man enjoying a certain competence who had taken to yachting as an amusement. Every summer, he dropped his palette and brushes, put on his master mariner's cap, which he had won after an apprenticeship aboard a coasting vessel, and set forth in his own schooner of thirty-six tons for a cruise in the Mediterranean. This went on for years until de Monfreid, weary of dodging quarantine restrictions, and getting entangled in the complications of maritime law, retired from the sea, generously offering his schooner to the Naval School at Cette, where she ultimately met her end.

At this period he was known to his artistic friends in Paris as "the captain," and had been introduced to Gauguin by Schuffenecker, on the former's return from Martinique in 1887.

To this man all lovers of Gauguin's art owe an immense debt. Whether it was due to the independent and roving disposition, shared by both, or to their common love and experience of the sea, or to the fact that both were painters (de Monfreid's experiences in the Mediterranean had made of him a good colorist), or to a certain bond of savage frankness and nomad primitiveness to which all the rest of their common tastes were due, is unknown. The fact remains that the friendship between them was of that ideal kind that is never broken: the friendship between the creator and helper, which all artists long for and to which so few attain. In finding de Monfreid, Gauguin experienced almost the last stroke of good fortune that he was to have in life. The last stroke of all came a little afterwards when,





HINA MARURU (FEAST TO HINA)



in the year after accepting de Monfreid's hospitality, he suddenly decided to leave Europe for Tahiti.

The happy discovery of a letter which Gauguin wrote at this time to a Danish painter, Willemsen by name, clears up the long-vexed point of what induced him to take this decision.<sup>1</sup> He chanced to attend, or to read the report of, a lecture on Tahiti, given by a certain Van der Veere. Van der Veere apparently pitched the tone of his discourse to suit the tastes of a fashionable audience. He pictured Tahiti as a terrestrial paradise where money was unknown. "Under a sky without winter, upon an earth of a marvelous fertility, the Tahitian has only to lift his hands to gather in his food; so he never works. For him life means singing and making love." It is easy to picture the effect of such phrases on the mind of a born lover of repose like Gauguin. Tahiti held out the hope that Martinique had failed to realize; the hope that he might be the first

<sup>1</sup> *Les Marges*, Paris, May 15, 1918.

painter of the tropics. Gauguin's imagination was fired by the idea. He declared that he intended to quit Europe and live in Tahiti henceforward. There he could perhaps forget all the hardships of the past, and die forgotten by Paris, happy and free to paint "sans gloire aucune pour les autres." And if his children could join him there, all the better—his isolation would then be complete.<sup>1</sup>

The young Symbolists of course shouted "Bravo!" at the news of the proposed voyage. Tahiti! Another symbol! They had already spoilt Gauguin sufficiently for serious art, by persuading him to embark on various symbolistic enterprises, such as the production of a masterpiece entitled *Loss Of Maidenhood*, which has fortunately vanished, and an etching representing Mallarmé with Poe's Raven in the background. Perhaps their eagerness to see Gauguin safely

<sup>1</sup> Gauguin had also undoubtedly read Loti's book. His letters show that before deciding upon Tahiti he had considered the possibility of going to Tonkin or Madagascar.

embarked for Tahiti only concealed a growing boredom with their idol of yesterday.

At all events Gauguin was fêted, wined, dined. Thirty of his works were auctioned off at the Hotel Diouot, producing the small sum of nine thousand six hundred and eighty francs. The Government consented to make his voyage to Oceania an official "artistic mission," on condition that this did not involve them in a responsibility for the expenses. A banquet was held at the Café Voltaire, where all the Symbolists were assembled. Gauguin has left some ironical observations on this or on a similar banquet, which show clearly his opinion of the ceremony. Finally a benefit performance was given by the Theatre d'Art for the departing artist and also for Verlaine, then rapidly sinking into the squalor of his last years.<sup>1</sup>

The most interesting fact about the performance was that, included in the pro-

<sup>1</sup> It may be noticed that Gauguin received no financial profit whatever from this performance, and Verlaine very little.

gram by a strange stroke of irony, Maurice Maeterlinck's play *L'Intruse* made on this occasion its first appearance on the stage. Death walked the stage before Gauguin's eyes, as if to show him what to expect. And yet he did not draw back.

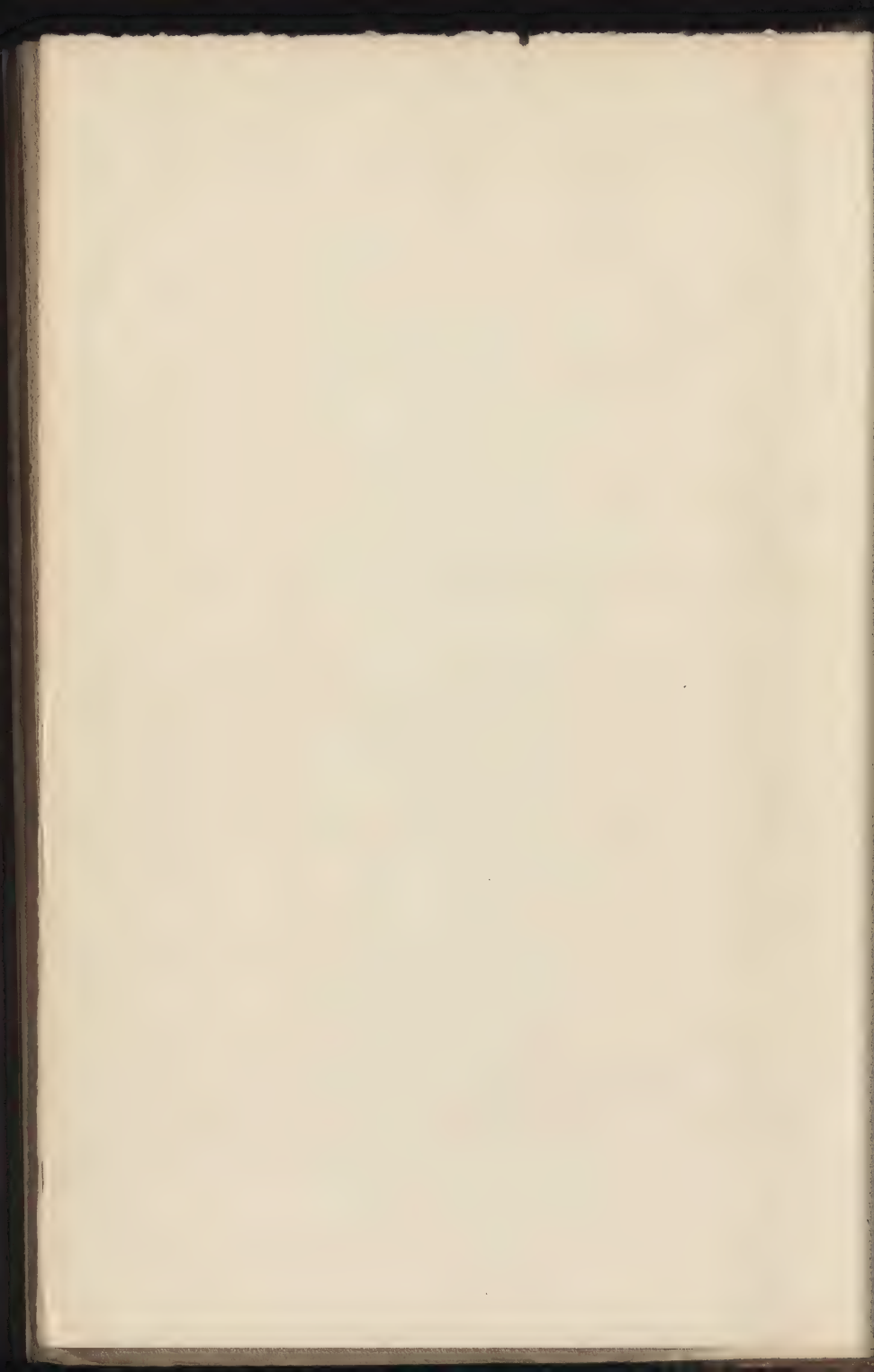
On the fourth of April 1891, Gauguin, abandoning Paris, started on his voyage of discovery to Tahiti. Morice, in his interesting book on Gauguin, declares that when the decision was irrevocably made, and the mission to Tahiti had been stamped with official approval, Gauguin's self-possession momentarily abandoned him, and he broke down, and wept. And when Morice asked the reason, he replied in these strange, tragic, touching words:—

“Listen to me. . . . I have never known how to keep alive both my family and my thought. I have not even been able, up to now, to keep alive my thought alone. And now that I can hope for the future, I feel more terribly than I have ever felt, the hor-

ror of the sacrifice I have made, which is utterly irreparable."

With this knowledge in his heart, Gauguin abandoned civilization.





#### PART IV.: THE RETURN TO SAVAGERY 1891-1895

**T**AHITI, the largest of the French Society Islands, lies in the South Pacific Ocean. That is about the limit of the average person's knowledge. Many perhaps understand vaguely that the climate is tropical but modified by sea breezes, the scenery wonderful, the people famous for beauty and licentiousness. Nevertheless, a more thorough knowledge of the island's mysterious racial story could not fail to interest. Tahiti, Samoa (known to us through Stevenson), Hawaii, New Zealand and the Marquesas (familiar to readers of Melville's "Omoo"), which are the chief links in that story, were all, at the time the islands were discovered, inhabited by the same people and a people utterly different in appearance from the

woolly-haired Papuans of New Guinea and Fiji, or from the straight-haired Malays of the peninsula, made familiar to us through the stories of Joseph Conrad. These island people, the Polynesians, were found speaking all the same tongue, though in different dialects; they had, for the most part, the same social organization and their religion, manners and customs were very similar; they had, in many cases, traditions pointing to a common place of origin in the island of Samoa. And yet from Samoa they lived separated by thousands of miles of intervening ocean, still imperfectly known, abounding in coral reefs, liable to dangerous storms, full of shifting currents. How then had they reached Tahiti?

The anthropologists assure us that the race is physically a branch of the Caucasian or Indo-European. Though their skin is dark, it is for the most part less dark than that of the natives of India. Set a Maori soldier from New Zealand beside an Indian cavalryman and note the difference between

the clear yellow skin of the former, which seems to give out light and the swarthy, somber brown of the latter. In other characteristics too the Polynesians are essentially Caucasian. They are a tall, well built, massive race, contrasting favorably with the Malay. Their hair is black—or in some cases copper brown—and wavy, again contrasting with the straight hair of the Malay or the fuzzy mop of the Papuan. Finally, the cast of face is purely Caucasian and in many cases very beautiful. Only the nose appears abnormally broad and flat, due to artificial flattening in infancy.

We must suppose then, that at some period unknown, but probably after the Christian era (the folk-lore of Hawaii, which must have been settled late, goes back to the fifth century) a seafaring race of Indo-European stock set sail from some part of the Indian peninsula in decked ships, capable of carrying one or two hundred persons and provisions for a voyage of some weeks. (We know the Polynesians were

capable of building such ships.) From India they made their way to the Malay peninsula, where traces of their passing still exist, and so gradually to Samoa, whence they spread northwards to Hawaii, southwards to New Zealand, eastwards to Tahiti, to the Marquesas and to Easter Island. In order to accomplish all this, their seafaring enterprise, warlike energy and astronomical knowledge must have been great. Later on, under the influence of too luxuriant a climate, the Polynesians became indolent, careless, effeminate. And, as such, they were discovered by the enterprising Anglo-Saxon, by the Frenchman with his Parisian vices, by the thorough and scientific German. The combined influences of missionaries, drink, disease and the labor market reduced the inhabitants from 150,000 in 1774 to 10,000 in 1889.

To these people came Paul Gauguin, unwitting of the tragedy of their history. It is true that he was weary of Europe and had set out with the aim he had cherished since



the Martinique days—to be the first painter of the tropics. But it is probable that he chose Tahiti at hazard, because he believed that here was a country where one could live for almost nothing. It must always be remembered that Gauguin had no private means and that his pictures, like all works in advance of their time, did not sell. Cézanne, Degas, could afford not to sell their pictures because they had other resources. But Gauguin was forced to find some way of existing while producing pictures that, as he knew well, it would take the public some time to accept. In a letter to de Monfreid he stated his system: “From the beginning, I knew that this would be a life from day to day; so, logically, I habituated myself to it. Instead of losing my strength in work and worry for the moment, I put all my strength into the day—like the wrestler who does not employ his body except in the moment of wrestling. When I lie down in the evening I say to myself: One more day is gained, perhaps to-morrow I shall be

dead. In my work as a painter, ditto—I do not trouble about anything, but each day for itself—at the end of a certain time, this covers a considerable extent of surface. If men would not waste their time in disconnected struggles and labors! Every day a link. That is the great point.”

Such was the frame of mind in which Gauguin went to Tahiti. What he found there was not the “Pays de Cocaigne” he probably expected. The Gods do not give their gifts in this fashion. Gauguin asked much from Tahiti and much was given. But he asked for material comfort and was offered instead spiritual salvation. In Tahiti, Paul Gauguin found, at last, his soul; and the work that he achieved there, though it brought him in no material fortune, was to stand and speak to later ages, its own terrible parable to all men.

## II

On the night of the eighth of June 1891, after sixty-three days of voyaging, Gauguin at last arrived at Papeete, the capital of Tahiti. He was at the time suffering from bronchitis, contracted during the last winter in Paris, and within a few days of his arrival was obliged to take to his bed.

He was now within a few days of his forty-third birthday. Although possessed of a normally strong constitution, fortified by the open-air existence of his youth and by various athletic exercises, such as boxing, fencing and swimming, of which he was very fond, his health, when he reached Tahiti, became immediately worse. This was largely due to his constant over-indulgence in tobacco and partly also to the privations which he had endured throughout his five years' struggle for livelihood.

His prospects were not brilliant. The

governor, Lacascade, an ignorant and brutal negro, learning that he had an official mission, at once took him for a spy sent out from Paris, and by every possible means attempted to hinder his getting into contact with the degraded and exploited native population. The society of the pseudo-European capital, Papeete, disgusted him. The natives of the interior were suspiciously hostile to all whites.

A few days after his arrival a public event occurred which roused his interest. It was the death of the last male representative of the old royal house of Tahiti, Pomare V, the son of the unfortunate Queen Pomare, who had vainly struggled to enlist Great Britain's sympathy in her opposition to the French occupation. Pomare V had abdicated eleven years previously; now he was dead and, with his death, the last dying gleams of Tahitian hopes for independence became extinct.

Pomare was buried in the uniform of a French Admiral, with full official ceremony

and according to the rites of Christianity; but in the attitude of the natives to this event, Gauguin was able to see that the embers of paganism still smoldered in the island and were ready to revive at any favorable opportunity.

He decided to quit Papeete and to hire in the interior a hut—a process which went far to exhaust his small capital. There he attempted to live as a native and to get in touch with the inhabitants. This made still further inroads on the nine thousand francs he had brought away with him from France. The natives held aloof, suspicious; they were only ready to approach him and to act as models at the sight of provisions, liquor, money. His efforts to get into closer touch with them were met only by enigmatic and evasive smiles.

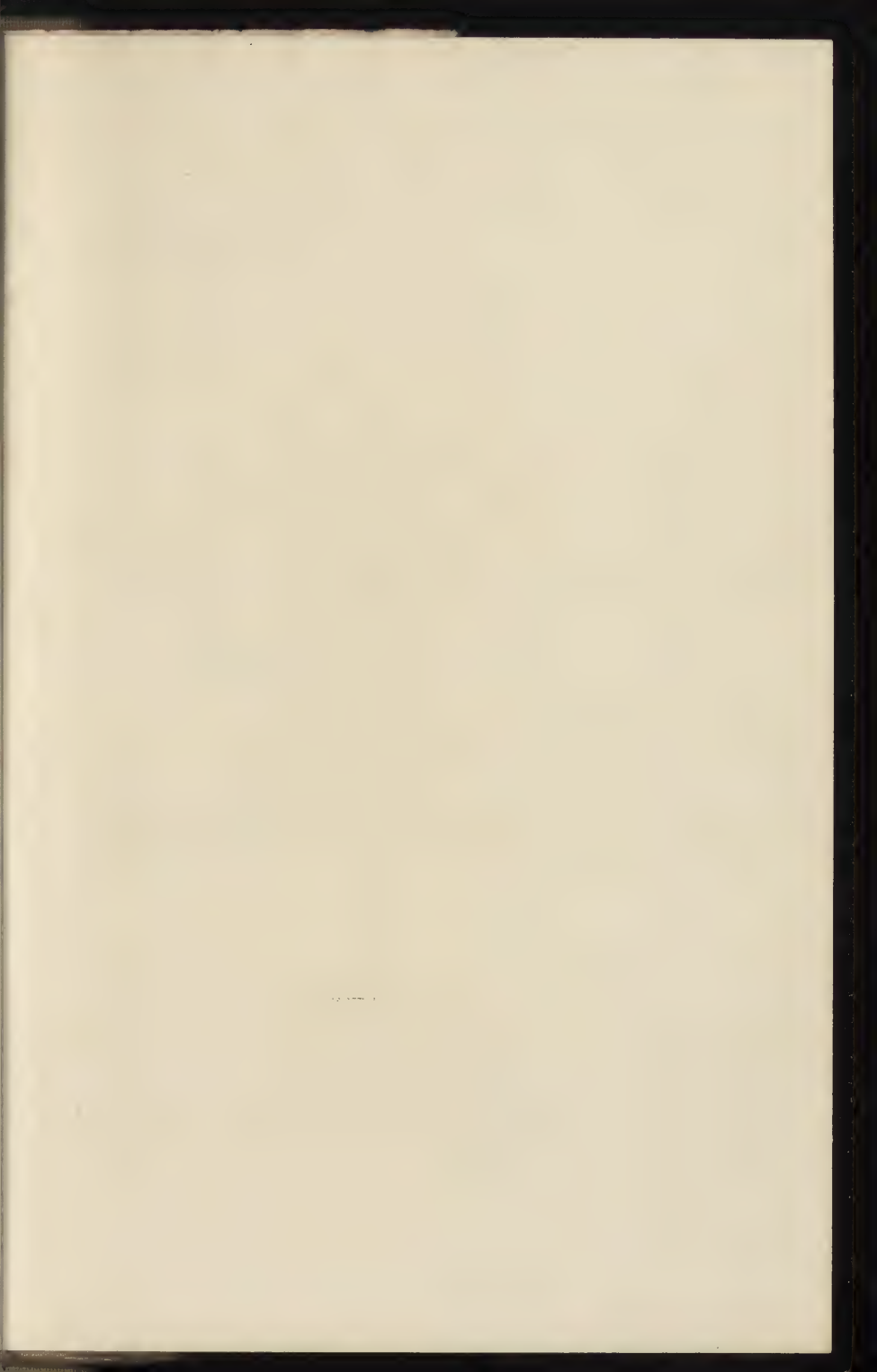
Nevertheless Gauguin persisted. Though we must regard the account given by himself in the pages of “Noa Noa” as representing rather the dream than the reality, he undoubtedly made a brave attempt to per-



suade the natives to accept him as one of their own kind. But, unfortunately, the natives had seen thousands of Europeans before him, either voyagers of the *Pierre Loti* type or commercial exploiters looking upon them as "dirty Kanakas." They now had their revenge in the only way possible to a conquered race. They spent his money, flattered his painting and his vanity, and smiled behind his back.

Before a year was out his capital had vanished. There were no buyers for his pictures on the island and Paris was far away. Gauguin found that he had suddenly aged—a common experience enough for white men coming suddenly into a tropic climate. His heart began to give him trouble. This savage Eden, which the white men had found and corrupted, was taking its little revenge.

He attempted to persuade the governor to furnish funds for his passage back to France. In vain. He hoped that buyers for his pictures would come forward in





THE OLD SPIRIT

! The Spirit watches.

Paris. Useless. Fortunately his fame was now spreading to neutral countries. Thanks to his wife's efforts he was invited to take part in an exhibition in Denmark.

On the eighth of December, 1892, he forwarded a packet of eight pictures to this exhibition, among which was the superb canvas *L'Esprit Veille*. The picture created an immense stir at Copenhagen when exhibited the next year and brought him in some money. But in Paris his fame steadily declined and he was every day less talked about.

Albert Aurier, a young critic who had written in his favor and helped to make his art known, was dead. Theodore Van Gogh, who had supported him and had attempted to find buyers for his work, had followed his unfortunate brother into the grave. Meanwhile his pupils of yesterday, Bernard, Sérusier and the rest, were going about Paris vaguely hinting that they had taught Gauguin something and that Cézanne and Van Gogh were better artists. The halo of

victory which had crowned his departure from Paris was rapidly fading.

He had painted already at Tahiti, as he knew, magnificent pictures—pictures better than anything he had done before. Moreover, he believed that he could now paint others from memory as well in Paris as elsewhere. What he had seen in Tahiti had given him the necessary material upon which his imagination, always synthetic and non-realistic, could work. His health and his future prospects could only suffer by a longer stay. He believed that in returning to Paris he could make himself once and for all an outstanding figure. If he did not, perhaps it would be better to give up painting altogether. He was growing old.

On the thirtieth of August 1893, he arrived at Marseilles with four francs in his pocket, after a terrible voyage in the steerage, in the height of summer, during which three unfortunate passengers died of heat in the Red Sea. It is almost incredible to think of, that this man, during the two years



he had been away from France, had painted, despite failing health, and financial miseries, over forty canvases, among them such masterpieces as *L'Esprit Veille*, *Matamoua*, and *Ia Orana Maria*. And yet this very same man arrived back in France a pauper! Truly, he might well say of himself, that he was born with the evil eye, which brings to its owner, as well as others, only misfortune.

### III

Paris has been for a century the most fickle and cruel city in the world. Since her spoiled darling Napoleon fell, there has been no one to whom she is willing to grant her favors for more than a day. There are a few exceptions to this rule. Hugo, because he lived in exile; Balzac, because he, too, was a hermit, continually pestered by his creditors; and of recent years Verlaine, because he haunted the lowest cafés, the vilest dens, and only emerged from these to go into a hospital or a prison. Such men may be the idols of Paris. For the rest, Paris is willing only to think of her children as lions for a day.

Gauguin returned, picturing a complete conquest of Paris. But he had already enjoyed the brief hour of glory that was to be his.

Had he but managed his affairs more

wisely, he might, on the strength of the sensation his pictures had created in Denmark and subsequently in Sweden, Norway, and Germany, have now concluded with a picture-dealer an arrangement enabling him to obtain a small fixed sum every year for his work. But Gauguin demanded all or nothing! And, as was the case before with his mother and her Peruvian relatives, the result was nothing.

He decided to give a general exhibition of his entire Tahitian work, forty-four pictures and two pieces of sculpture. Durand-Ruel gave him a gallery and Charles Morice, chief of the young symbolists whom Gauguin had met after the Volpini show, wrote a preface to the catalog, which probably only served to mystify the public still further.

For the effect of the exhibition on public and press was to produce frank bewilderment. Of the forty-four pictures exhibited, thirty-three remained unsold. What misled visitors more than anything else were the

titles that Gauguin had seen fit to attach to his pictures. These titles were in the Tahitian language. Every one immediately supposed that in order to understand the pictures, it was necessary to be expert in the history, the folk-lore, the manners and customs of Tahiti. Naturally therefore the pictures seemed to be mere archæological and ethnological puzzles, only to be read by those possessing the key.

Gauguin, of course, had intended something else. Just as he had used Brittany to suggest the somber passion and suffering of Christ, so he had used Tahiti to suggest the primal innocence, the enigmatic mystery of life as it was lived in Eden and in the days of man's awakening—in that Golden Age dreamed by every great poet and every great painter. But it was useless for him to try to explain that Tahiti had merely given him material out of which his imagination had evolved pictures.

Morice pictures him standing at the exhibition, day after day, and listening with

perfect composure to the stupid remarks and laughter of the crowd. It was, as he later said of himself, the torture of the Indian who smiles at the stake. Only Degas came and understood. To him on the last day of the exhibit, Gauguin said: "Monsieur Degas, you have forgotten your cane," and taking down a cane he himself had sculptured handed it to the astonished painter.

The bitterness of sheer starvation would assuredly have been his, had not fortune, with sly mockery and with perhaps a desire to save Gauguin for better things, sent him means of salvation. A brother of his father died in Orleans, well-to-do and a bachelor. From his estate, Gauguin inherited thirteen thousand francs.

The exhibition had been a mistake, but his next move was sheer folly. Instead of reflecting calmly upon his situation, he rented a studio and determined to make one more attempt to impress and startle Paris. Morice admits that this was done at the insistence of his so-called friends. If this was



the case Gauguin would have done well had he uttered the well-known prayer, "Deliver me from my friends!" For Morice, even, admitted later that it was, under the circumstances, a mistake.

About Gauguin's studio and his life at this period the legends have grown with the years. It is undoubtedly a fact that his walls were colored pale yellow, and his windows painted with Tahitian subjects in imitation of stained glass (these same windows were, by the way, on exhibition at a dealer's in Paris a few years ago). It is true that his rooms were decorated with trophies, boomerangs, wooden clubs, spears. It is true that he kept a monkey and a model, a mulatto woman who is said to have come from Java and who was certainly more of a trial to him than anything else. It is true also that he wore a strange costume, consisting of a long blue riding coat with pearl buttons, a blue waistcoat embroidered yellow, brown pantaloons, and a gray slouch hat with a blue ribbon. But the importance

of these and of similar details is very slight. Gauguin has been dead now for some years and it is time that the recollection of these pitiable attempts to attract the attention of heedless Paris were dead also and forgotten.

Despite this parade of self-satisfied vanity, Gauguin found himself ill-at-ease. The facile adulation of the symbolists, who frequented the tea-parties he gave at his studio, could not hold him. He wandered off to Bruges, where he remained rapt with admiration before Memling and astounded, half-overwhelmed by the brutal energy of Rubens. He lost interest in the new pupils who offered themselves, Seguin and O'Connor. After a vain attempt to get a post from the Government as a resident in Oceania, he again drifted back to Pont-Aven.

There, one day, promenading upon the beach with the persistent mulatto model at his side, he was jeered at by some sailors. In a moment, all his ridiculous artifices and

carefully-studied poses slipped from him. He was again a savage, fighting for the right to exist in his own way. He attacked the sailors but they were too many for him and one, slipping behind him, launched a well-aimed kick and broke his leg at the shin.

The mulatto fled, took a train to Paris, entered the empty studio, seized whatever she could lay her hands on and vanished. As for Gauguin, he lay on a stretcher, uttering not a groan but stoically rolling and smoking a cigarette.

## IV

Little by little there had been dawning in his mind a vague understanding; and now, as he lay on his bed in the inn at Pont-Aven, this understanding became a conviction.

He saw and understood at last what it was that he had tried to accomplish and why he had failed. He knew now what his art had been; a great protest, an external manifestation of the inner revolt that had gone on in his soul. What he had fought against was the cunning extortion, the moral degradation, the bargaining hypocrisy, of nineteenth century Europe. And nineteenth century Europe had risen against him, was casting him out, was destroying him. He must either submit or declare war, for the sake of his life, his art, his soul.

Among the people of Tahiti, labeled contemptuously "savages" by the very folk who

had hampered the development of his art at every opportunity, among these savages he knew that he had found honor, courage, moral dignity, and disinterested kindness as he had found them nowhere else. Among these oppressed and exploited savages, there still survived vestiges of a civilization in which art had its proper place in the scheme of things, as a means to fuller and more joyous life and as a door opening upon the mysteries of that beyond which neither scientists nor theologians could ever pierce. Among these savages he had found a dark subterranean hatred of the new civilization, which they knew to be destroying them; and now he looked and saw the same hatred in his own soul.

On September 20, 1894, he wrote to Daniel de Monfreid:—

“As you say, I have not given any news of myself recently and every one is complaining. The reason is, you see, that I have lost all my strength through suffering, above all at night, which I frequently pass with-



out any sleep. And into the bargain naturally I have done nothing this infernal month except spend money. For the rest, I have made a fixed resolve to go back and live always in Oceania and shall return to Paris in December in order to occupy myself exclusively in selling all my bazar at no matter what price. If I succeed I shall leave as soon as possible in February. I can then finish my days without care for the morrow and without the external struggle against fools—Farewell to painting, except as a means of distraction. My house will be in sculptured wood.”

The resolve expressed by this letter was carried out. Gauguin returned to Paris and threw the “bazar,” as he called it, upon the market. An auction sale was planned of the pictures remaining in the studio. On his return from Tahiti, Gauguin had met August Strindberg, then living in Paris. Strindberg had taken a certain interest in his work and for a time the two men had lived together. Gauguin now applied to

him for a preface to the sale catalog. The following letter was Strindberg's response and in its words we read intellectual Europe's complaint against Gauguin:

"You insist absolutely upon having the preface for your catalog which I wrote in remembrance of the winter 1894-5, when we were living here, behind the Institute, not far from the Pantheon, more important still, close to the Cemetery of Montparnasse! I would have willingly given you this souvenir, to take away with you to that isle of Oceania, where you wish to seek a decoration in harmony with your powerful stature, and a breathing space, but I feel myself in an equivocal position from the outset, and I respond immediately to your request by an 'I cannot' or, more brutally, by an 'I will not.'

. . . "I cannot grasp your art and I cannot love it—I know that this avowal will neither astonish nor wound you, because you seem to be only strengthened by the hatred

of others; your personality, careful to remain intact, is pleased by the antipathy that it arouses. Perhaps with reason, for, from the instant when, approved and admired, you obtain partisans, either they will rank you or classify you or give to your art a name which the younger men shall have used for five years to designate a superannuated style of painting.

... "It was of Puvis de Chavannes that I thought last night, when to the southern sounds of mandolin and guitar, I saw on the walls of your studio an uproar of sunlit pictures, which pursued me in my sleep. I saw trees which no botanist will discover, animals unsuspected by Cuvier and men which only you can create.

"A sea which pours forth from a volcano, a sky in which no God can live—Sir, said I in my dream, you have created a new heaven and earth, but I am not delighted in the midst of your creation. It is too sunny for me; I prefer more chiaroscuro. And in

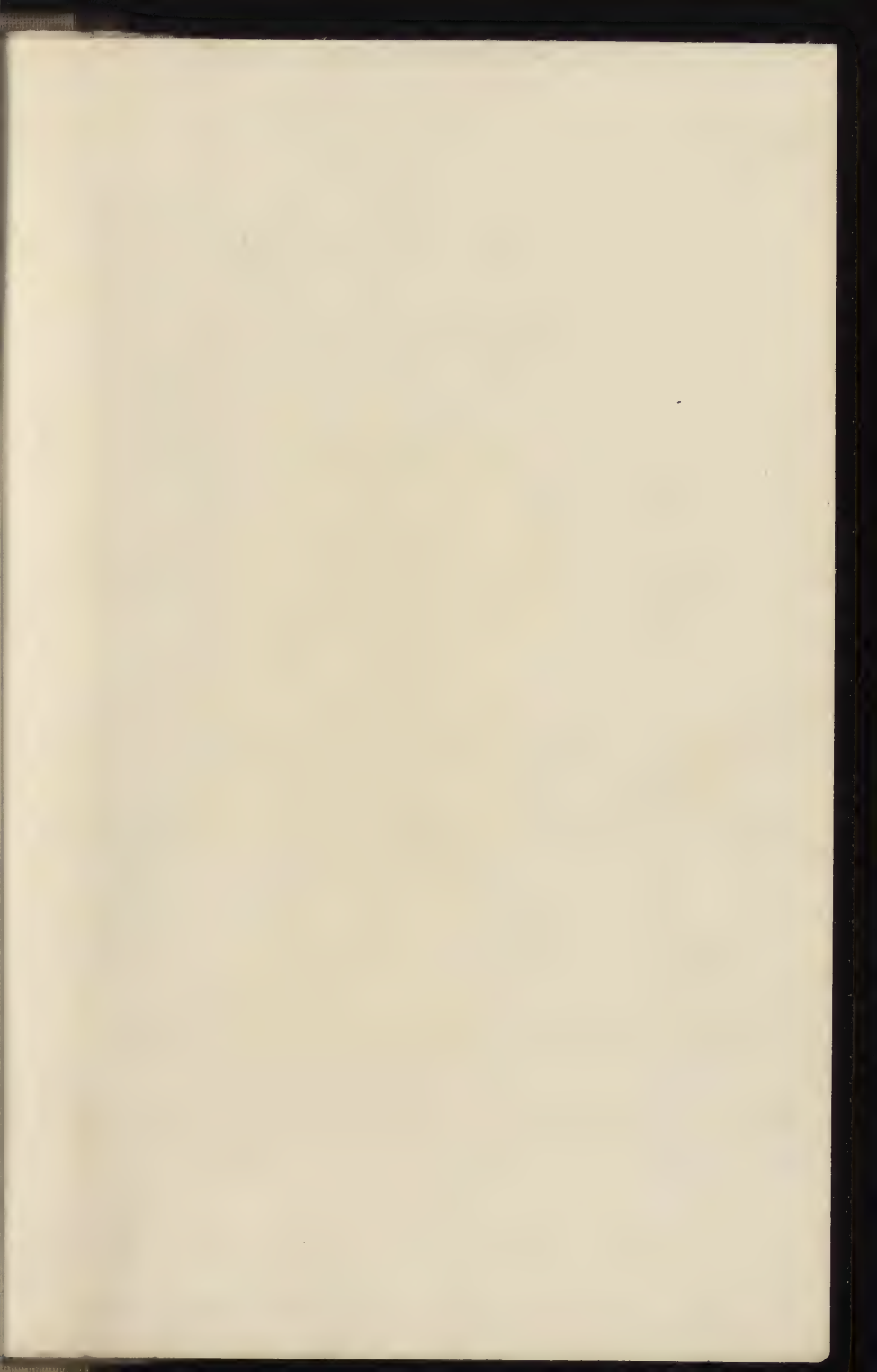
your paradise there lives an Eve who is not my ideal, because truly I, too, have a feminine ideal or two!

"This morning, I went to the Luxembourg gallery to look at Chavannes, who always comes back to my mind. I contemplated with a profound sympathy his picture of the Poor Fisherman, so attentively occupied in watching the boat, which brings him to the faithful love of his spouse, and slumbering child. That is beautiful. But it seemed to me this Fisherman wore a crown of thorns, and that shocked me. For I hate Christ and all crowns of thorns. You understand that I hate them. I do not desire this pitiful God who accepts blows. My God is rather Vitsliputsli, who, in the sun, eats the hearts of men.

*unintelligible  
after God.*

"No, Gauguin is not formed from the work of Chavannes, nor from that of Manet, nor from that of Bastien-Lepage.

"Who is he then? He is Gauguin, the savage who hates a wearisome civilization; something of a Titan who, jealous of his







CALVARY

Creator, in his idle moments makes his own little creation; a child who breaks up his toys to make others; he who denies and defies the rabble, preferring to see the sky red, rather than blue, as they do.

"Bon voyage, Master: but come back here to me. I shall by that time perhaps have learned to understand your art better, which will permit me to make a true preface for a new catalog of a new sale, since I am beginning also to feel an immense need for becoming savage and creating a new world."

To this letter, Gauguin replied with the following profession of faith:—

"I have received to-day your letter; your letter, which is a preface for my catalog. I had the idea of asking you for a preface, when I saw you the other day in my studio playing the guitar and singing, your blue northern eyes gazing attentively at the pictures on the walls. I had then the presentiment of a revolt, of a shock between your civilization and my barbarism.

"You suffer from your civilization. My barbarism is to me a renewal of youth.

"Before the Eve of my choice, which I have painted in forms and harmonies of another world, your remembrances have perhaps evoked a sorrow of the past. The Eve of your civilized conception makes you and the rest of us almost always misogynists; the old Eve, which in my studio frightens you, will perhaps smile at you less bitterly some day. This world of mine, which neither a Cuvier nor a botanist can find, will be a Paradise, which I shall have only sketched out. And from the sketch to the realization of the dream is very far. What matter? To envisage happiness, is that not a foretaste of Nirvana?

"The Eve that I have painted, she alone, logically can remain naked before one's eyes. Yours in that simple state could not walk without shame, and too beautiful (perhaps), would be the evocation of an evil and a sorrow."

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In February, 1895, the pictures were sold bringing in twelve thousand francs. And shortly after the artist shook the dust of Europe from his feet and departed for his final voyage to Tahiti. As Morice says, he left Paris with a smile, and without turning his head to look back.

## V

It was in the same spirit as that in which he quitted Europe finally, that Gauguin set himself the task of writing the story of his life in Tahiti. This story, which appears in the pages of the book he entitled "Noa Noa" (a native word meaning "fragrant"), is at once the best commentary on and the final analysis of his mind.

We do not know when Gauguin first conceived or executed the part of the book that is his. It may have been during his long hours of solitude on his first visit to the island; perhaps it was during his stay in Paris; perhaps it was after his return. The part of the book that is not his refers in passing to events that took place as late as 1897.

Gauguin wished to write the story of his conversion to savagery—the conversion of a man who realized that he himself was tainted



with civilization, incapable of becoming more than half-a-savage, yet realizing utterly that savagery was naked, healthy and sound, while civilization was corrupt, over-luxuriant and decaying.

To accomplish this task, he sought for a style as free from literary artifice as possible. His aim was to state what he had seen in Tahiti, in the style of a folk-tale. He deliberately eschewed rhetoric, exotic ornament, all the devices of the tourist, the journalist, the professional litterateur. What he wanted, above all, was to make others feel, in the incidents of a naïve story, the essence of Tahiti—the soul of the native.

It is therefore useless to ask whether the story of his return to savagery told by Gauguin in this book, has any basis in fact or whether it is largely allegory. It may be both or neither. It contains certain undoubted facts: first, that Gauguin saw on his arrival at Papeete the royal funeral and was struck by the attitude of the natives to that event; second, that he quitted Papeete and

attempted to live as a native, abandoning European dress and speech as far as possible; third, that in the course of his stay in the island he entered into relations with one or more native women; finally, that he quitted the island, owing to money troubles and in the hope of obtaining a substantial triumph in France.

These facts are not important, and are merely the vague skeleton upon which the fascinating story of Gauguin's spiritual development is bit by bit, built up. He made use of these facts in the same way as he made use of models in his pictures, as the basis for the suggestion of beautiful forms. All art to him was transposition, and in the pages of his recital he deliberately attempted to transpose his opinions on civilization, savagery, and life, into a series of imaginary adventures, which we are at liberty to believe or not as we choose.

So we follow him from Papeete into the backwoods. We find him holding aloof from the savages at first and marveling at

their simple hospitality. We see him making his first tentative attempts at establishing a community of thought. He tries to persuade the natives to sit for their portraits—with little success. He tries to find solace in the companionship of the half-caste Titi, in vain. Then Jotefa comes upon the scene, the young man whose body reveals to him the hitherto unsuspected fact that civilization has only accentuated differences of sex, and thereby rendered sex more dangerous, more artificial, more unnatural. So he gets his first gleam of intelligence. The next comes, when Jotefa declares that he cannot touch the chisel, that an artist is not like other men, but some one producing a thing useful to others. This further enlightens him. He contrasts this opinion on art as something useful to man with art as the European sees it, a mere freakish amusement. Finally, he hazards everything. He takes a young native girl and makes her his wife, not without qualms of fear. All goes well until one day away from home, when he is out

fishing with the natives. They laugh at his luck. He asks them why. Because his line has caught in the lower jaw of the fish and that is a sign of a man's wife being unfaithful to him. He returns home, half-believing the superstition. The native girl prays, weeps, asks to be beaten. He cannot beat her. He can only forgive and understand. So the story closes.

From such a story, we should naturally receive the impression that Gauguin's life in Tahiti was ideally happy. But his letters reveal that he was even more unhappy there than in France. So whatever elements of fact may be in his story, it is evident that they cannot be disentangled from the fictional details. It is better to take "Noa Noa" altogether as a series of fictitious adventures, designed to bring out the fact that Gauguin became, despite himself, as nearly one with the natives as it is possible for any European to be. Thus we see, bit by bit, the Tahitians claiming him as one of their own, from the day that he is forced by neces-

sity to accept their food offered and at first scornfully refused, to the day when he finds that he shares their superstitions and even their easy tolerance of marital infidelity. If we look at the story in this light, it becomes an allegory easily readable, an allegory of civilization going down before primitive nature, expressed in a series of parables.

Unfortunately, Gauguin suspected that this story would seem too bare and devoid of literary charm if he published it as it stood, and he asked Charles Morice to collaborate. Morice thereupon wrote a series of highly florid descriptions and poems, inspired by Gauguin's pictures, in a style strongly tinged with the influence of Stephane Mallarmé. These poems and descriptions were intercalated between the pages of Gauguin's recital.<sup>1</sup> The result is that "Noa Noa" contains two books; the first Gauguin's, the second, Morice's, and the reader is liable to be confused unless he remembers that the

<sup>1</sup> They have been wisely omitted from the English translation.



sections by Gauguin are all headed "Le Conteur Parle," and that these sections form by themselves a continuous story. Morice's contributions can therefore be disregarded.

It is perhaps better not to discuss whether or not these contributions add anything to Gauguin's recital. Some people may even prefer the glow of Morice's rhetoric to the naked blaze of Gauguin's poetry. Gauguin himself philosophically remarked that he wished Morice's work to stand beside his, in order that people might observe the difference between a civilized decadent and a naïve and brutal savage.

PART V: THE FIGHT AGAINST  
CIVILIZATION  
1895-1903

I

WITH Gauguin's last return to Tahiti there opened for him the final and most important phase of his life. the last stand of the savage against encroaching civilization. The letters that he sent to de Monfreid during this period are painful reading. They breathe the weary cry of a man who knows that Fate's dice are loaded against him, the complaint of a warrior who realizes that fighting is useless, but who has no choice but to fight on. For Gauguin was now exhausted by the struggle that he had carried on so long with the world outside and within himself. The wound in his leg, given him by the sailors, had never prop-

erly healed; under the climate of Tahiti, it reopened. Owing to the rash exposure of his skin to the effects of tropical light, both legs were attacked by eczema. Night after night was spent in sleepless pain. To add to his troubles, his eyesight began to fail; nature was taking her revenge on him, was wreaking upon his body retribution for the sins of which the white race had been guilty in their dealings with the natives. It seemed to him that the gods he worshiped had become his enemies.

Before leaving France, a number of friends had agreed to buy his pictures, and assure him a steady income. These now withdrew their support. He had leased a plot of ground in order to build the house of sculptured wood which he dreamed of; the construction of the house carried away his remaining capital. He was everywhere fleeced, not only by the French colonists, but also by the natives, who were growing more and more corrupt every day, thanks to the happy influence of civilization. Even after

his house was built, he was not allowed to keep it in peace. The owner of the ground died, leaving his affairs in a tangle; Gauguin was forced to obtain another plot and to reconstruct the house, or see it destroyed. This last he refused to do, so he was forced, finally, to borrow money, a thing he had never done in his life before.

Towards the end of 1897, his situation grew even worse. His eyes, now permanently inflamed, were so painful that he could not even touch a brush. The tragic portrait of himself in profile, which he sent about this time to de Monfreid, clearly reveals the condition of his eyesight. De Monfreid had sent him colors, but these were useless—he could not even exchange them for bread. And to add to all he was in debt, more and more heavily, month after month. De Monfreid wrote him encouragingly, tried to sell his pictures, spoke of articles, of a press campaign on his behalf. The answer was—"I only desire silence, silence and again silence. Let me die in

peace, forgotten, or if I ought to live, let me live in peace, forgotten. . . . What matter if I am the pupil of Bernard or Sérusier? If I have painted daubs, why set out to gild them, to deceive people as to their quality?"

Early in 1898 his resolution was taken. Weary, exhausted, at the end of his tether, he decided to meet death half-way. He finished a large picture, a sort of strange allegory of despair, entitled *D'où venons nous? Que sommes nous? Ou allons nous?* and then took arsenic. The dose was too strong and only brought about terrible nausea, which recurred for some months afterwards whenever he attempted to take food. Meanwhile his creditors menaced him with the destruction of the house that had taken him so much trouble to build.

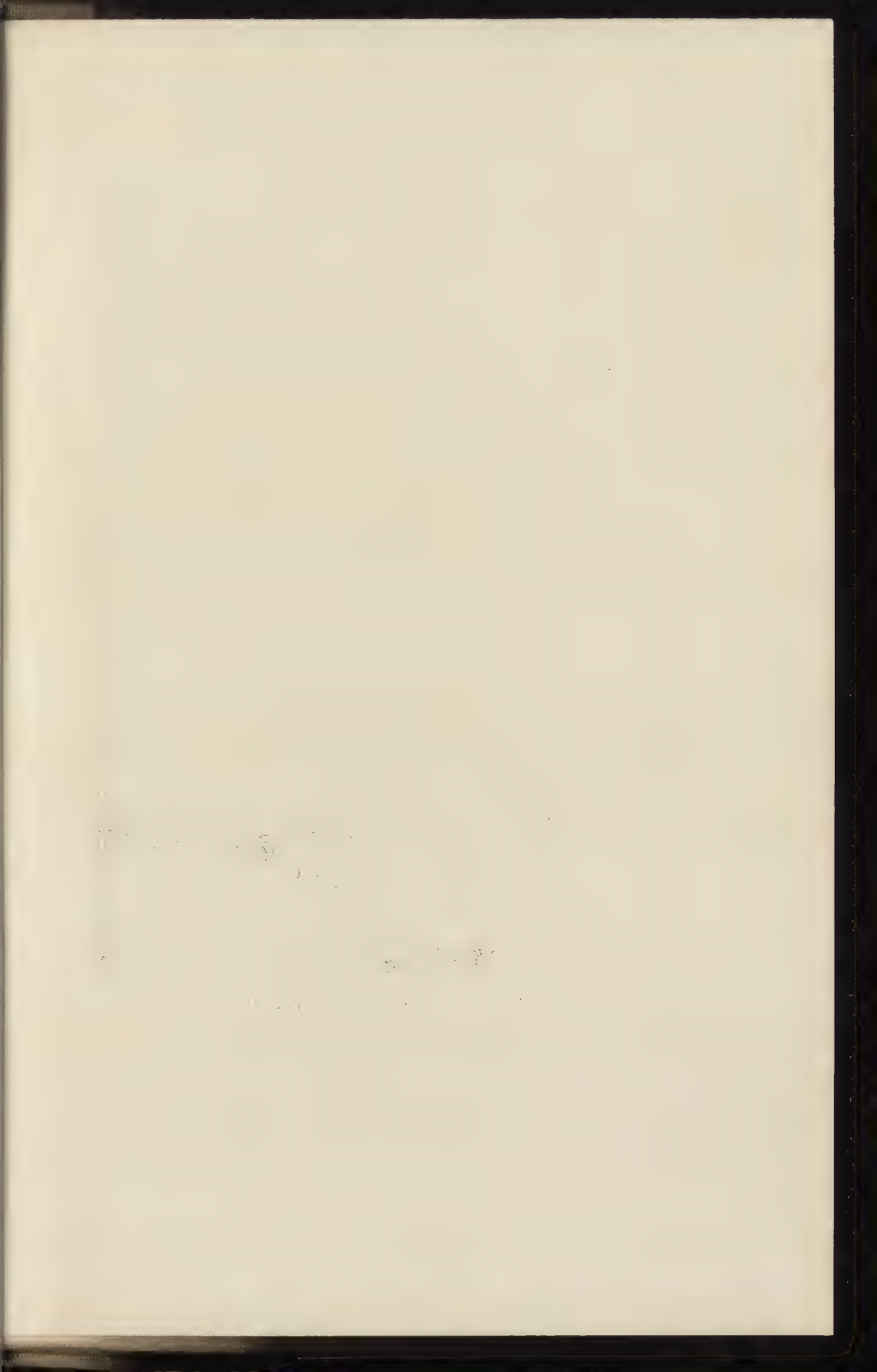
In order to obtain food, he shortly afterwards returned to Papeete and, at the age of fifty, took up a position as a shipping clerk at the Board of Public Works, with a salary of six francs a day. To such straits



was he reduced, and yet he continued the fight. Can one help admiring his tenacity?

Meanwhile, the devoted de Monfreid had been busy. He had enlisted the interest of Degas, of Vollard and others, and had succeeded in selling some of the artist's pictures. Gauguin might now have counted upon a steady income, had he chosen to forget past injuries. But with him, there was to be no compromise. Because Bernard, Sérusier, Maurice Denis had made his theories popular and had even claimed to have some influence on his development, he refused either to be ranked with them or to exhibit in their company. Of course he merely made himself more unpopular in Paris by such conduct. But Gauguin's personality was of a kind unable to endure the society of second-rate people. He admired genius where he found it, in a few solitaires such as Degas, Poe, Balzac, and Mallarmé. For ordinary society, he preferred either natives or children.

Nevertheless his pictures were sold and, by de Monfreid's efforts, he found himself out of debt in 1899 and able to return to his house, now in a deplorable state of neglect and decay. Things seemed to improve a little, though he was now permanently crippled by the disease of his legs. He set himself once more to paint and to plant the flower seeds which de Monfreid had sent, at his request, from France. Ill, ruined in health and physique, a victim to drugs, he went onward to his goal.





MATAMUA (OLDEN DAYS)

## II

It is difficult to judge fairly the next stage in Gauguin's career, unless we remember that he had suffered so much from his physical ailments, from the complete solitude in which he found himself and from the terrible crisis of the previous year, that he was afflicted for the time being with something closely resembling persecutorial mania. He had been driven to war on civilization and he believed that some unknown power was now pursuing him with its hatred. In his next stage, we find him turning even against the natives.

On his return to Tahiti he had taken a young native girl aged thirteen-and-a-half for wife, companion and model. She had served him devotedly, had procured him food when he was unable to walk, had nursed him in his illness. After his return to the house from Papeete, she had resumed with



him the old life and had given birth to a child. Now, for some reason or no reason, Gauguin suddenly took it into his head that she had robbed him, and drove her out. The poor soul, however, returned and, as the painter was by this time a helpless cripple, he attempted to call in the law to enforce her removal, claiming that her return was a violation of his domicile. Of course, the law did nothing.

This only further enraged Gauguin. He decided to attack the entire colonial administration. Since his return, he had been everywhere treated by the Europeans at Tahiti as a madman or fool. Now he would get his revenge.

With the aid of a copying apparatus he set up and printed several numbers of a paper called, first *Les Guèpes*, and later *Le Sourire*. The contents of these papers have been printed and are the poorest stuff that Gauguin ever wrote. But these crude gibes at the governor and at the colonial administrations generally, together with the equally

crude caricatures that Gauguin drew of prominent people in the colony, seem to have produced a stir. People began to fear him at last; it was, for a moment, a triumph.

But Tahiti had by this time grown too civilized to hold him. A railway had been built into the interior; the Protestant missionaries grew every day more powerful; disease and drink were rapidly carrying off the natives. Gauguin for a time thought of turning doctor and even wrote to de Monfreid for medicines. But shortly he found his own need of medicine as great as that of any of the wretched natives. An epidemic of influenza struck the island and the painter was obliged to take to the hospital, where he had to pay twelve francs a day. To add to his griefs, the supply of food in the island became scarce and prices ran up to an impossible figure.

Hearing that life in the Marquesas Islands was cheaper, that the natives there were physically more unspoilt, also that Europeans were few and far between, he de-

cided to quit Tahiti and install himself in the island of Hiva-Hoa or Dominica. He hoped to find there elements of a purer savagery and to paint with fresh strength. This hope was destined to be realized only in part.

Gauguin's art is almost entirely associated with three spots, Martinique, Brittany and Tahiti. He might have done better work at other places, had he had the time, the opportunity or the strength. In the case of his removal to the Marquesas it was the strength that was lacking.

Traces of the exhaustion of his endurance and of the affection of his eyes are to be found even in his latest Tahitian pictures. Owing to his habit of dating his pictures, we can follow the failure of his power. The first things that he painted after his return are, on the whole, superior to the productions of 1891-93. The *Te 'Arii Vahine* or Reclining Woman, of 1896 is finer in design even than the *L'Esprit Veille* of 1892-3. The *Youth Between Two Girls*, *La Case*

(1897), the beautiful *Navé Navé Mahana* (Delightful Days) of 1896, with its feeling of a terrestrial paradise—these are masterpieces of their kind. But the portrait of himself (1897) already shows signs of inability to finish and remains a sketch, albeit a powerful one. And with many of the succeeding works there came a greater impatience, a greater carelessness, a more hectic and feverish lack of control. The more savage Gauguin's work grew, the less became his strength to produce it. One is reminded of a similar case to his, that of the Irish dramatist, Synge.

The Gauguin who sought solitude of far-off Hiva-Hoa was not the Gauguin of ten years before. He was an extinct volcano, a burned-out crater. And he was destined to find only death in this last solitude. Nevertheless, before death came, his art attained its final summit of expression. Pictures like the *Jeune Fille à l'Eventail* (1902) or the magnificent *Contes Barbares* (also 1902) in which the Marquesas type appears,

are the last word of Gauguin's gospel of beauty, the revelation of a new heaven and earth. The flame burned clear in him just before the close—then the shattered body yielded and all was darkness.



### III

The Marquesas Islands are small and, in contrast to the coral and basaltic formation of Tahiti, of volcanic origin. They lie about a thousand miles nearer to the equator and this makes their climate more humid and less supportable to white men. Owing to this fact, and to the fact that they are out of the track of steamers between San Francisco and Sydney, they have preserved more of their unspoilt character.

The natives are said to be the finest in appearance of any Polynesian peoples. In distinction to the Tahitians, who are either red or olive brown, their skin is largely of a clear golden color. In this they resemble the Maories of New Zealand, as in the practice of face-tattooing common among the males. They were formerly great fighters

and ferocious cannibals, as Herman Melville's "Omoo" tells us. The first white settlers amongst them were French Roman Catholic missionaries who, by buying up most of the valuable land, by discouraging the drink traffic and by preventing other familiar colonial abuses, have succeeded in preserving the native stock fairly well. The Marquesas have never become the sink of vice and corruption which is Tahiti.

It was on the chief island of this group that Gauguin installed himself. His capital enabled him to buy a plot of ground and to start constructing another house. This, like his house in Tahiti, was ornamented with bas-reliefs in wood and large decorative paintings. In the garden, stood a rude clay statue—a sort of combination of a Buddha and a Maori idol—under a canopy. Gauguin called this statue *Te Atua*—the God, and was reported to say his prayers to it every day. On the base of the statue were engraved these words, taken from Morice's verses in "Noa Noa":

"The Gods are dead and Tahiti dies of their death,  
The sun, which once lit the isles with flame, now  
sleeps,  
A sorrowful sleep, with brief dream wakenings:  
Now the shadow of regret pierces the eyes of Eve,  
Who pensively smiles, gazing upon her breast,  
Sterile gold, sealed by some divine design."

Altogether in the Marquesas, Gauguin found a great charm and repose. He seems to have rapidly established a great friendship with the natives and to have looked upon himself as being a sort of king. But his health was so bad that he was unable to leave the house and but for one Chinese boy, he lived alone. He even dreamed of abandoning the Marquesas (not because he was weary of the place, but because he knew his strength was small) and seeking a more favorable climate in Spain, where he thought he might be able to paint.

Except for the constant trouble with his health, his only difficulty was with the missionaries. With the exception of a few settlers, they were the only whites on the islands. Gauguin had advanced in savagery

to such a point as to be unable to bear the presence of white people. He refused to see that the Catholic Missionaries had at least attempted to save the natives from the worse fate that had befallen them under the Protestant Missionaries in Tahiti. The insistence of the Catholics upon monogamy, upon European dress, upon mission schools and religious observances infuriated him. He made a statue of a nude woman and set it up in his garden. The Bishop protested. Gauguin promptly made a caricature in clay of the bishop, with horns on his head like the Devil, and set it up facing the statue. Something of the old Gothic love of the grotesque, something, too, of the typically Parisian desire to "*é pater de bourgeois*" remained in him to the last.

But this was not all. Gauguin was not the sort of man to end his days in peace. Although de Monfreid had worked devotedly, his position in France was still insecure; Vollard might at any moment refuse to take more pictures to sell. The wound

he had received by his failure to impress Paris in 1893 still smarted. He determined to write two articles containing his opinions on art, technique, painting, life and morality, in order to confound the Parisian critics. These articles, entitled "Anecdotes of an Apprentice" and "Before and After," are little more than a series of feverishly jotted notes. Later, with other notes of a similar nature, they were embodied in a large album entitled "Avant et Après," which remains the fullest body of information about Gauguin's life and art we possess. The *Mercure de France* judged, perhaps rightly, that their tone was too personally violent and refused to print them.

The other old score that he had to wipe out was with the French colonial administration. In Tahiti, he had fought the governor, the law courts, and the gendarmes. Here it was the customs officials who roused his wrath. Two American ships had recently visited the island and a certain amount of goods had been sold to the natives,



through the connivance of the gendarmes, without paying tax. Gauguin immediately wrote a letter on the subject to the Administration, stating the facts as he understood them and protesting, on behalf of the natives, against the bribery and corruption of the Customs in this instance. The only reply made was a notice from the law courts that the Administration intended to take steps against him for the dissemination of an untrue statement. Gauguin appeared in court, where he was promptly condemned to prison for three months and to a fine of a thousand francs.

It was ruin, but Gauguin determined to appeal. The tribunal was irregularly constituted and his facts had been proven to be in part, at least, true. He was sure of winning his case, but an appeal necessitated a return to Tahiti and the costs of an attorney, and his capital was again running low. He wrote to de Montfried, begging him to find a buyer for three pictures, at the price of

fifteen hundred francs; he sent off ten more pictures to Vollard. Then he prepared to make his appeal.

Death surprised him suddenly and Paul Gauguin's appeal will never be heard in this world.

A letter from the only white man, the Protestant minister Vernier, who knew him, leaves no doubt on the subject of the cause of Gauguin's death. It was not the eczema of the legs, nor leprosy, as some have hinted, nor another dose of arsenic, nor syphilis, that ended his life; it was a simple syncope of the heart. His energy, with which he had kept up for so many years the struggle with the world and out of which he had drawn so many beautiful pictures, was worn out. The machine slackened and stopped.

Paul Gauguin died on the 6th of May, 1903.

A few days before his death he had written his last letter to Charles Morice, the words of which stir one like a trumpet.

"I am on the ground but I am not beaten. The Indian, who smiles while he is being tortured, is not conquered. You are mistaken if you meant that I am wrong in calling myself a savage. I *am* a savage, and the civilized feel this, for there is nothing in my work which could produce bewilderment save this savage strain in me, for which I am not myself responsible. It is therefore inimitable. Every human work is a revelation of the individual. Hence there are two kinds of beauty; one comes from instinct, the other from labor. The union of the two, with the modifications resulting therefrom, produces great and very complicated richness. Art-criticism has yet to discover the fact. . . . Raphael's great science does not for a moment prevent me from discovering the instinct of the beautiful as the essential quality in him. Raphael was born with beauty. All the rest in him is modification.

"Physics, chemistry, and above all the study of Nature, have produced an epoch of

confusion in art, and it may be truly said that artists robbed of all their savagery have wandered into all kinds of paths in search of the productive element they no longer possess. They now act only in disorderly groups and are terrified if they find themselves alone. Solitude is not to be recommended to every one, for a man must have strength to bear it and to act alone. All I have learnt from others has been an impediment to me. It is true I know little, but what I do know is my own."

Yet civilization, after all, had the last word. The very bishop, whom Gauguin in life had hated and caricatured, intervened when he lay cold and lifeless and the body of the painter was interred with full Catholic rites in the cemetery of the Church at Atuana. And, by a concluding stroke of irony, the grave was left unmarked. Thus one of the greatest painters of the later nineteenth century, and one of the bravest men the world has ever seen, mingled his dust

with that of the humblest natives, in the same way as Blake, one of the greatest painters of the early nineteenth century, had been buried before him in an unmarked grave among the paupers, at Bunhill Fields.



## IV

The immense industrial development which occurred during the nineteenth century took place so rapidly and universally, that no one was able to estimate its significance or dispassionately to weigh its effects. At the outset of the century the vital idea that pervaded Europe and America was the spiritual idea of liberty and the rights of man, born in the fires of the French Revolution. After 1848 this idea gradually vanished, and another took its place; the purely material idea of progress. The perfected application of steam and the consequent development of machinery; the immense tapping of the world's resources of coal, metals, agricultural products; the equally immense, universal exploitation of human effort necessary to develop these resources to their maximum; the creation of an international finance, resting upon vast hoards of wealth

in the hands of a limited few, whose worldwide interests were linked together by railways, steamship lines, telegraphs, telephones; the ordered regimenting of mankind into a small capitalist class, invisibly controlling the old, decayed aristocracy, the official church, the machinery of the law; a larger middle class, dependent upon and subservient to the capitalists; and an immense laboring class, exploited in the interests of the two preceding classes: all these were virtually the creation of a single century.

Against this overwhelming flood of change, a few exceptionally gifted men vaguely protested, affirming the greater value of human life over mechanical invention; maintaining the antique dignity of man. Their protest was incoherent, individualistic. These men were like broken and scattered fragments of dykes, still unsubmerged and striving to hold back the waters of a flood. Among them must be ranked the artist whose life-story I have written.

All that is vital and valuable in French painting of the nineteenth century, since Ingres, springs directly from the enthusiasm and spiritual energy of the French Revolution. The somber fury of Delacroix, the colossal caricature of Daumier; the peasant art of Millet; the sane realism of Courbet; the mordant irony of Degas and Forain; even the feeling for nature and the open air which the Impressionists gave us, all represent phases of humanity's vague and enormous hunger for personal freedom, for human liberty and development. When Gauguin arrived on the scene, the reaction was already taking place. The official, academic painters were merely ringing the changes upon a stock of outworn formulas. On the other hand, the Impressionists were striving to render nature scientifically, unemotionally. Nature was becoming to them no longer the mother and nurse of man but a collection of chemical formulas for soil, air, sunlight. Only Puvis de Chavannes remained, aloof and misunderstood, painting

great decorations that seemed but the remembrance of some golden age of the past, and easel pictures of a profound, hopeless pessimism.

Gauguin began to paint, and the protest against science, against materialism, against unemotional vision began. At the outset he attempted to follow the scientific formulas of the Impressionists. But, by the purest instinct he discovered, as Cézanne had already discovered, that the sensation of light could not be painted, could only be rendered in color. And he also discovered (this time the discovery came from Puvis de Chavannes) that the sensation of form could not be painted either—that out of the variety of shifting forms offered to us by nature, the artist must select those most significant to him and that even these must be transposed, altered, accentuated or suppressed to suit the harmony of the composition. Thus unconsciously, almost without volition on his part, he was led to understand that the Primitives everywhere were the truly great

artists, since they expressed great human emotions about man and nature, without troubling whether their vision was or was not exact. And so he fought, bitterly, savagely, for the actual restoration of primitive art and life; for the cause of natural humanity against the cause of mechanical, dehumanized efficiency.

Unless we realize this fact, we have not grasped the key, either to his art or to his life. Gauguin himself admitted that his painting was only a fragmentary indication, an unrealized promise of an unaccomplished world. And he may have had knowledge also of the fundamental discord and disorder of his own life, but have despaired of ever attaining to harmony with himself. At least the caricature of himself in *Contes Barbares* is here to remind us that he was not altogether the spoiled child that some imagine him to be. Having both the world and himself to struggle against, he at least determined that his pictorial work should represent the best part of his personality,



even if his life proved only to be, as he said in his last letter to de Montfried, "a downfall followed by an attempt to rise, followed by another downfall." And so in his pictures we realize the truth of the remark made by Van Gogh after the disaster that parted them: "Gauguin made one feel that a good picture should be the equivalent of a good action."

And indeed it is so. Every artist carries upon his shoulders a profound moral responsibility. This responsibility is not, as supposed, the duty of teaching us to conform to the modern official distortion of Christian ethics, by which we are ruled. It is not the duty of upholding a system of negations, of prohibitions, of compromises, striking at the very roots of life. It is a far nobler, far more difficult task. The duty of the artist is to affirm the dignity of life, the value of humanity, despite the morbid prejudices of Puritanism, the timid conventional-ity of the mob, despite even his own knowledge of the insoluble riddle of suffering,

decay and death. This duty Gauguin in his art strove to accomplish. He affirmed his faith in man and in the scene of man's labor, the earth. Cézanne, perhaps a more accomplished painter, endowed perhaps with a deeper respect for nature and for the style of the great painters of the past, shrank from making Gauguin's affirmation. He accepted in his own life a compromise; in his art he ruthlessly eliminated the role of the creative and interpretive imagination. And then, towards the end of his life, Cézanne complained that Gauguin had vulgarized him.

"Gauguin has not understood me; never will I accept the lack of gradation and of tone; it's nonsense."

It would have been better for Cézanne to have said that he could not, dared not understand Gauguin.

Nor is this all that Gauguin accomplished. He restored painting to its proper place in the ordered hierarchy of the arts. He showed us that its place is between archi-

itecture and music, and that sculpture is its twin sister. He was the first man to suspect that the progress of the scientific spirit among the Greeks had produced the same effects in disassociating and destroying the arts, as has the progress of the scientific spirit in the present day. He believed, and constantly affirmed, that painting was entering upon a new musical phase and he built up his pictures on a definite scale of color harmonies, as well as upon the chosen architectural proportions of form, which, whether given by perspective or not, seemed to him necessary. Thus he reconciled the Venetians and the Primitives, and showed that the goal of both form and color is decoration.

William Blake might perhaps have admired this rude artisan, who painted his dream of a golden age in his own way, who steadfastly strove to grasp the essential truth in every tradition: Egyptian, Cambodian, Persian, Chinese, Gothic, Greek and Renaissance. But Gauguin could never, had he

known of Blake, have pardoned in him the ultimate ascetic negation, the contemptuous denial of earthliness, of "the delusions of the goddess Nature." In Gauguin, the spirit never conquered the flesh, and he remained to the end, a man. Blake was possibly the greater visionary: Gauguin is certainly the better stone on which to build.

## V

After Gauguin's death, his art rapidly became almost forgotten in France. He remarked himself towards the end of his life that there were not fifty of his pictures in that country. Even the few there are, hang in scattered private collections, each containing one or at most three or four. The great bulk of his work is in Germany, Scandinavia and Russia. It proved impossible even in 1911 to raise sufficient money to buy *L'Esprit Veille* for the Louvre.

It is greatly to be regretted that no museum or collection has been able to assemble a considerable quantity of his work. Gauguin was, above all things, a decorator, and half a dozen of his pictures make a greater effect than one. One does not judge Puvis de Chavannes, another decorator, solely by his easel pictures, but by the great decorative schemes in Paris, at Amiens and in Boston. This remark applies equally



to other decorators, such as Raphael, Michelangelo, Tintoretto and Veronese. A room hung with twenty Gauguins would produce an immense effect of monumental power. That such a room exists in Moscow can be small consolation to Western Europeans at present.

His pupils and followers either plodded along unimaginatively, like Sérusier, or drifted off into academicism, like Bernard, or watered down their technique into the tasteless picture-book and stage-costume decoration of Maurice Denis. None of them seized Gauguin's secret of remaining simple, direct and savage. Aristide Maillol is an honorable exception. A sculptor and tapestry designer, he was able to work upon the indications that Gauguin had left for the guidance of these branches and to show us, in part at least, how they might be realized.

The main stream of French art simply ignored Gauguin. Instead of making with him a bold leap backwards to the origins of all tradition, it went forward to even more

scientific and unemotional essays in painting. The Neo-Impressionists with their spots of complementary colors were followed by disciples of Cézanne, who sought to reduce all forms to certain geometrical primaries, basing their doctrine on certain words which the master of Aix had let fall concerning the simplification of form. Out of these emerged Matisse, whose art became, through a more and more ruthless elimination of modeling, through a more and more arbitrary placing of colors, an abstraction, an utterly unemotional series of hieroglyphs. Then Picasso came upon the scene, eliminated color altogether and began to paint the abstract geometry of form. The Cubists followed Picasso. The Futurists in their turn started another kind of abstract painting, the painting of mechanical energy, the dynamism latent in form.

The Expressionists, meanwhile, held to Van Gogh's and Gauguin's idea that the picture must represent some emotion, but they denied Gauguin's corollary that some form

derived from nature was necessary to trans-  
pose this emotion into its pictorial equivalent.  
Consequently they eliminated form and strove to paint abstract emotion. Finally, the Vorticists combined Futurism and Expressionism into a single whole and painted the abstraction of an abstraction—the emotion of dynamic energy, thus declaring painting to be an absolute-thing-in-itself, an art utterly innocent of any illustrative purpose whatsoever.

The motives of all these confused art movements, perplexing and apparently incongruous, were identical. They were all actuated by a mania for scientific discovery, a desire to analyze phenomena until the reality behind phenomena could be found. The physicists, chemists, philosophers had proven that the world of appearances was not the real world—that everything that existed was merely a question of ions and electrons, of radiant or non-radiant energy, or perhaps of elasticity and inelasticity. These young art revolutionaries, who gave them-

selves so many queer labels, were not, as many supposed, either insincere or insane. They were merely smitten with the desire to make painting—and not only painting, but even other arts as well—a branch of abstract science. The world of phenomena had been proved to be an illusion, making some abstract concept. Therefore they strove to paint, not what seemed to them unreal, but their absolute conceptions. This new metaphysic, this new attempt at absolute realism, this final development of scholastic art-dogma, as narrow and soul-destroying in its way as the rules for painting religious ikons, evolved and practiced for centuries by the Byzantine monks of Mount Athos, was rapidly conquering the whole field of art when the past war broke out. Nor has the war altogether suppressed its manifestations.

The enormous destruction of human life, of nature, of art, in the past war has been altogether out of proportion to the military results achieved by either side. However true it may be to hold the Germans as pri-

marily responsible for this destruction, in the first instance, yet it remains true that none of the contending forces can escape responsibility for the later developments of the struggle. Apart from Germany's undeniable guilt in starting the war, civilization as a whole must answer for the horror of its method. A piece of heavy artillery is equally destructive, whether it be cast at Essen or at Le Creusot; a Caproni aeroplane can carry as many bombs as a Gotha; the submarine was first employed in war by the Americans; the machine gun is an English invention. For all these devices of destruction we of the twentieth century, with our belief in purely material progress, stand guilty to-day; and the blood of our guilt has reddened earth already for over four years and may continue to do so for many generations to come.

The past war before it came to an end had long ceased to be a contest between national ideals and had become a struggle between man and an inhuman, scientific, or-



ganized machine. And the machine was victorious. Just as the scientific spirit, conquering art before the war, led to the extravagancies of Cubism and Vorticism so, since the war, it has attacked life itself and made of national existence, no longer a problem of human bravery, resource and intelligence, but merely a problem of relative man-power and munitions. We have learned to speak of "man-power" as our books on physics speak of "horse-power." The task we, in the war, set ourselves was a grisly paradox; we proposed to save civilization, to undo a great wrong, by destroying the very basis of human life on which all civilization stands.

It is therefore with a sense of liberation that we now turn back to a few artists who, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, foresaw that material progress would end in annihilating humanity, that nature and humanity, hand in hand, are more sacred than all the shells that could ever be produced, the guns that could ever be mounted or the laws

that could ever be written. With a sense of spiritual release we revert to those who dreamed of the great return to nature—to Rousseau, Whitman, Gauguin, as well as to others who, although perhaps lesser men than they, followed in their path—David Thoreau, Richard Jefferies. They were the prophets of the new gospel that must some day prevail—the gospel that will set humanity above material progress and nature above aesthetic negation. Their vision was of something not in themselves but of something higher and nobler, as Gauguin knew when he deliberately caricatured himself in *Contes Barbares*. As he knew also, the vision was of something stated only fragmentarily, inscribed as a promise, a foretaste, an indication of what might be. In Rousseau's prose, in Whitman's poetry and in Gauguin's painting we see the only gleam of hope for self-tortured humanity, and the promise of a land where nature and man are one and where reigns a peace that passes all understanding.

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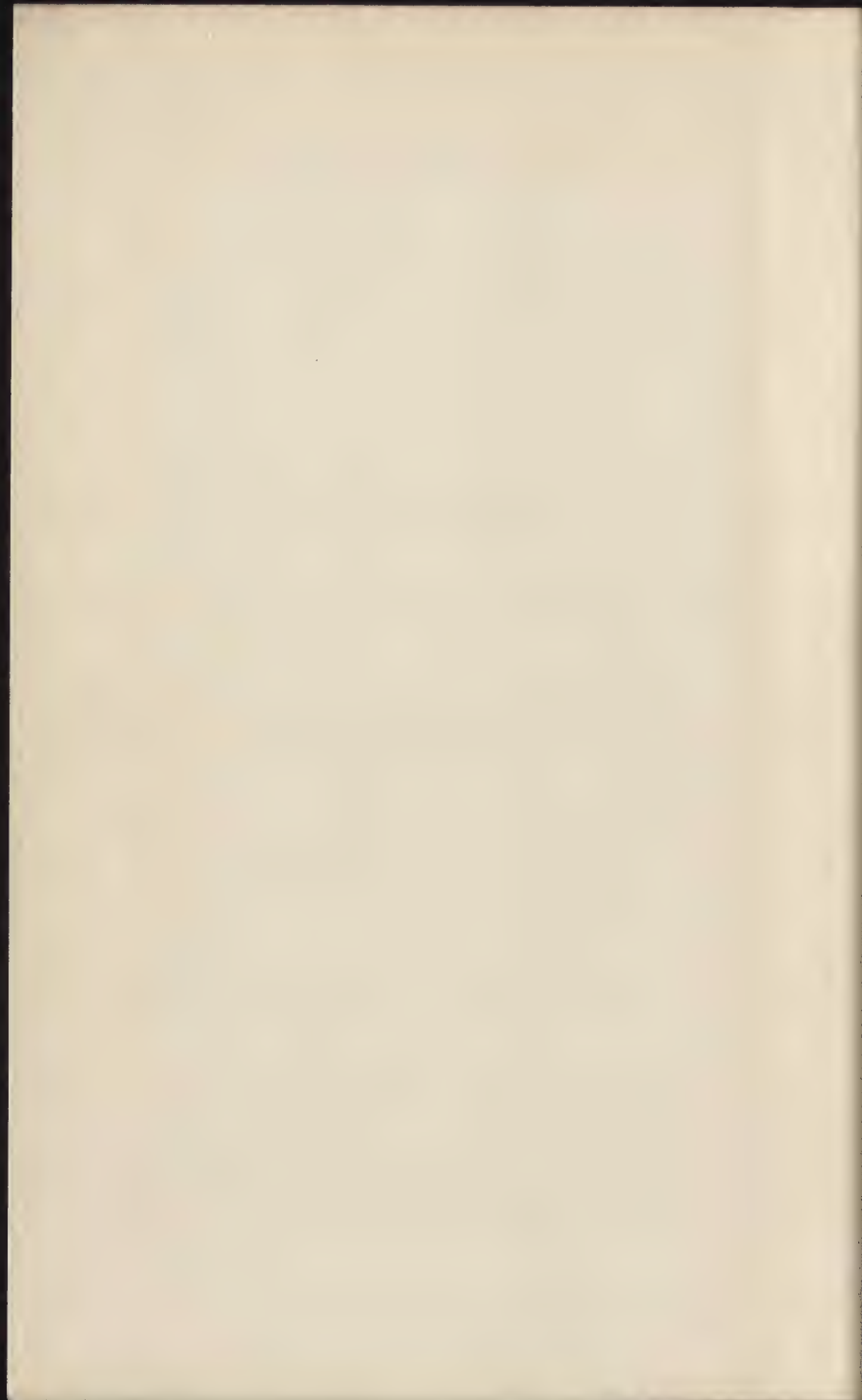
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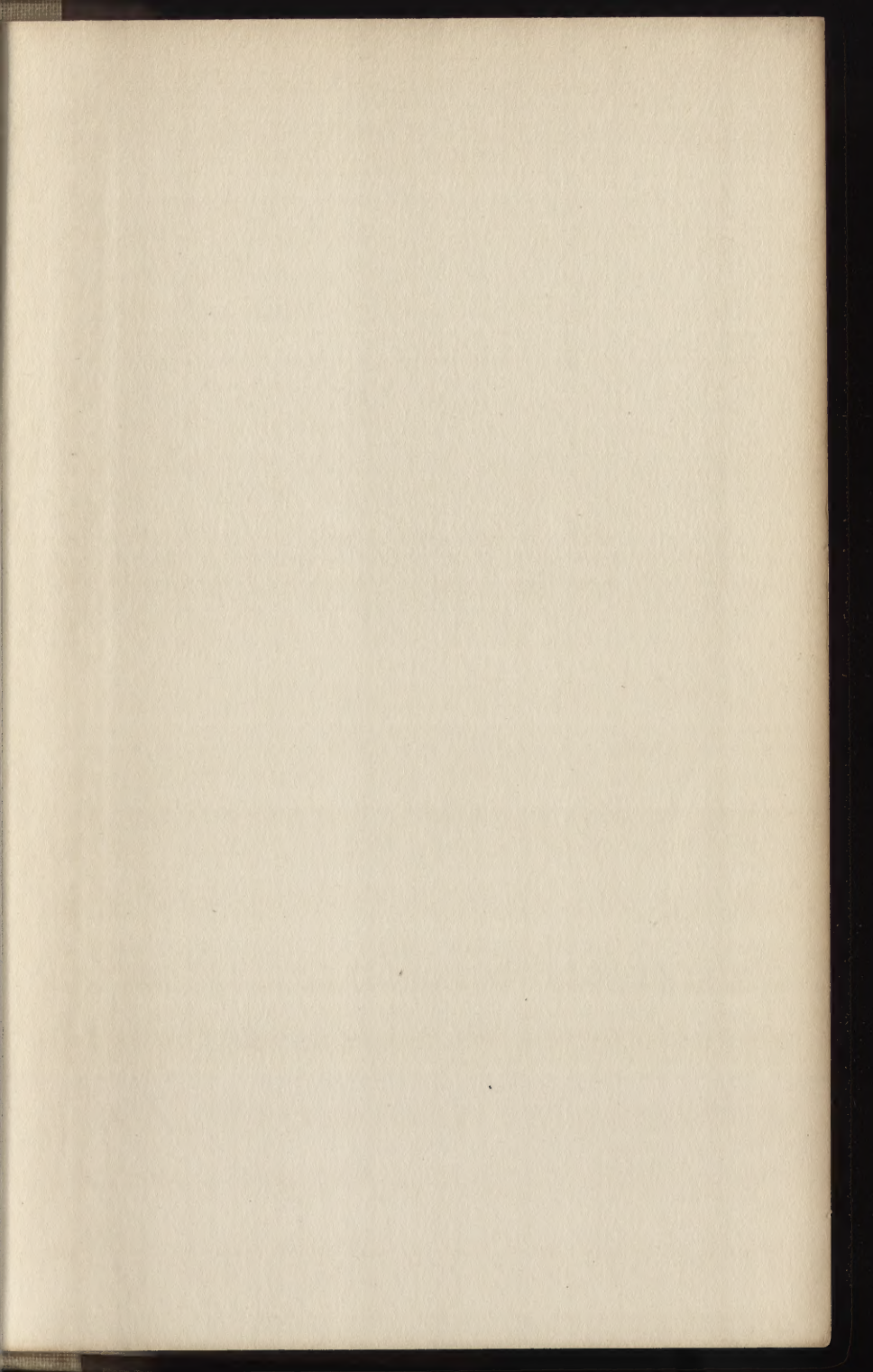
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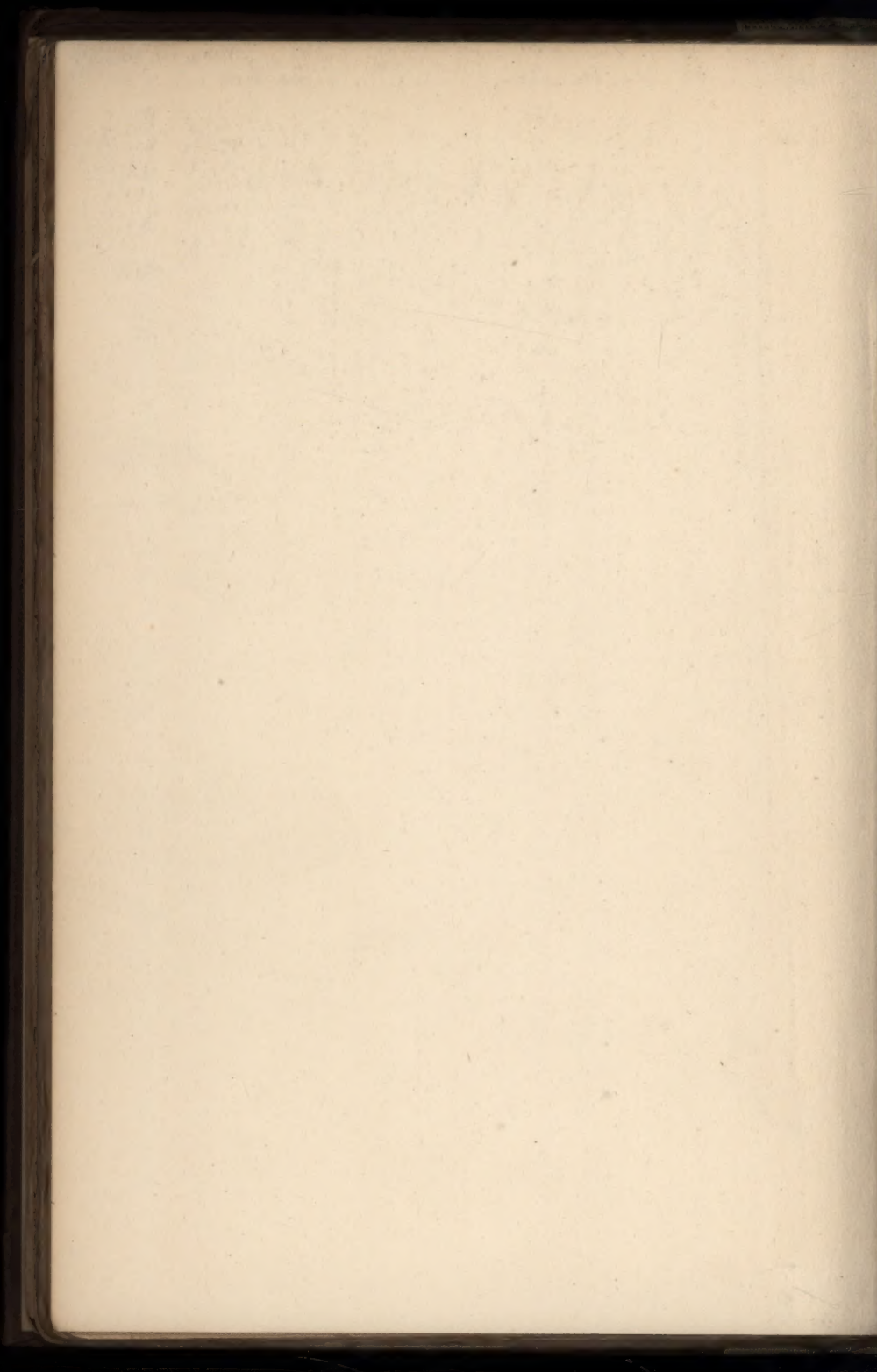
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